

Fantasy Tales

IN THE X-RAY
by Fritz Leiber

Charles L. Grant
Frances Garfield
Adrian Cole

Winter
90p \$3



FANTASY TALES

Volume
8

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WINTER, 1985

Number
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FANTASY TALES is a non-profit magazine published occasionally. Single copies, 90p (plus 20p p&p) or \$3.00 (plus \$1.00 p&p). Three-issue subscription, £3.00/\$11.00. Rates for contributions are negotiable. All copyrights to their material are owned by the individual writers and artists who contributed to this issue.

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"Dr. Ballard was staring incredulously at the X-ray."

In the X-Ray

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustration by TOM CAMPBELL

"DO THE dead come back?" Dr. Ballard repeated the question puzzledly. "What's that got to do with your ankle?"

"I didn't say that," Nancy Sawyer answered sharply. "I said: 'I tried an ice pack.' You must have misheard me."

"But..." Dr. Ballard began. Then, "Of course I must have," he said quickly. "Go on, Miss Sawyer."

The girl hesitated. Her glance strayed to the large, gleaming window and the graying sky beyond. She was a young woman with prominent eyes, a narrow chin, strong white teeth, reddish hair, and a beautiful, doe-like figure which included legs long and slim - except for the ankle of the one outstretched stockingless on the chair before her. That was encircled by a hard, white, somewhat irregular swelling.

Dr. Ballard was a man of middle age and size, with strong, soft-skinned hands. He looked intelligent and as successful as his sleekly-furnished office.

"Well, there isn't much more to it," the girl said finally. "I tried the ice pack but the swelling wouldn't go down. So Marge made me call you."

"I see. Tell me, Miss Sawyer, hadn't your ankle bothered you before last night?"

"No. I just woke up from a nightmare, frightened because something had grabbed my foot, and I reached down and touched my ankle - and there it was."

"Your ankle didn't feel or look any different the day before?"

"No."

"Yet when you woke up the swelling was there?"

"Just as it is now."

"Do you think you might have twisted your foot while you were asleep?"

"No."

"And you don't feel any pain in it now?"

"No, except a feeling of something

hard clasped snugly around it and every once in a while squeezing a bit tighter."

"Ever do any sleepwalking?"

"No."

"Any allergies?"

"No."

"Can you think of anything else - anything at all - that might have a bearing on this trouble?"

Again Nancy looked out the window. "I have a twin sister," she said after a moment, in a different voice. "Or rather, I had. She died more than a year ago." She looked back quickly at Dr. Ballard. "But I don't know why I should mention that," she said hurriedly. "It couldn't possibly have any bearing on this. She died of apoplexy."

There was a pause.

"I suppose the X-ray will show what's the matter?" she continued.

The doctor nodded. "We'll have it soon. Miss Snyder's getting it now."

Nancy started to get up, asked, "Is it all right for me to move around?" Dr. Ballard nodded. She went over to the window, limping just a little, and looked down.

"You have a nice view, you can see half the city," she said. "We have the river at our apartment. I think we're higher, though."

"This is the twentieth floor," Dr. Ballard said.

"We're twenty-three," she told him. "I like high buildings. It's a little like being in an airplane. With the river right under our windows I can imagine I'm flying over water."

There was a soft knock at the door. Nancy looked around inquiringly. "The X-ray?" He shook his head. He went to the door and opened it.

"It's your friend Miss Hudson."

"Hi, Marge," Nancy called. "Come on in."

THE stocky, sandy-haired girl hung in the doorway. "I'll stay out here,"

she said. "I thought we could go home together though."

"Darling, how nice of you. But I'll be a bit longer, I'm afraid."

"That's all right. How are you feeling, Nancy?"

"Wonderful, dear. Especially now that your doctor has taken a picture that'll show him what's inside this bump of mine."

"Well, I'll be out here," the other girl said and turned back into the waiting room. She passed a woman in white who came in, shut the door, and handed the doctor a large, brown envelope.

He turned to Nancy. "I'll look at this and be back right away."

"Dr. Myers is on the phone," the nurse told him as they started out. "Wants to know about tonight. Can he come here and drive over with you?"

"How soon can he get here?"

"About half an hour, he says."

"Tell him that will be fine, Miss Snyder."

The door closed behind them. Nancy sat still for perhaps two minutes. Then she jerked, as if at a twinge of pain. She looked at her ankle. Bending over, she clasped her hand around her good ankle and squeezed experimentally. She shuddered.

The door banged open. Dr. Ballard hurried in and immediately began to re-examine the swelling, swiftly exploring each detail of its outlines with gentle fingers, at the same time firing questions.

"Are you absolutely sure, Miss Sawyer, that you hadn't noticed anything of this swelling before last night? Perhaps just some slight change in shape or feeling, or a tendency to favour that ankle, or just a disinclination to look at it? Cast your mind back."

Nancy hesitated uneasily, but when she spoke it was with certainty. "No, I'm absolutely sure."

He shook his head. "Very well. And now, Miss Sawyer, that twin of yours. Was she identical?"

Nancy looked at him. "Why are you interested in that? Doctor, what does the X-ray show?"

"I have a very good reason, which I'll explain to you later. I'll go into details about the X-ray then, too. You can set your mind at rest on one point, though, if it's been worrying you. This swelling is in no sense malignant."

"Thank goodness, Doctor."

"But now about the twin."

"You really want to know?"

"I do."

Nancy's manner and voice showed some signs of agitation. "Why, yes," she said, "we were identical. People were always mistaking us for each other. We looked exactly alike, but underneath..." Her voice trailed off. There was a change hard to define. Abruptly she continued, "Dr. Ballard, I'd like to tell you about her, tell you things I've hardly told anyone else. You know, it was she I was dreaming about last night. In fact, I thought it was she who had grabbed me in my nightmare. What's the matter, Dr. Ballard?"

IT DID seem that Dr. Ballard had changed colour, though it was hard to tell in the failing light. What he said, a little jerkily, was: "Nothing, Miss Sawyer. Please go ahead." He leaned forward a little, resting his elbows on the desk, and watched her.

"You know, Dr. Ballard," she began slowly, "most people think that twins are very affectionate. They think stories of twins hating each other are invented by writers looking for morbid plots."

"But in my case the morbid plot happened to be the simple truth. Beth tyrannized me, hated me, and...wasn't above expressing her hate in a physical way." She took a deep breath.

"It started when we were little girls. As far back as I can remember, I was always the slave and she was the mistress. And if I didn't carry out her orders faithfully, and sometimes if I did, there was always a slap or a pinch. Not a little-girl pinch. Beth had peculiarly strong fingers. I was very afraid of them."

"There's something terrible, Dr. Ballard, about the way one human being can intimidate another, crush their will power, reduce to mush their ability to fight back. You'd think the victim could escape so easily - look, there are people all around, teachers and friends to confide in, your father and mother - but it's as if you were bound by invisible chains, your mouth shut by an invisible gag. And it grows and grows, like the horrors of a concentration camp. A whole inner world of pain and fright. And yet on the surface - why, there seems to be nothing at all."

"For of course no one else had the faintest idea of what was going on between us. Everyone thought we loved each other very much. Beth especially was always

being praised for her 'sunny gaiety'. I was supposed to be a little 'subdued'. Oh, how she used to fuss and coo over me when there were people around. Though even then there would be pinches on the sly - hard ones I never winced at. And more than that, for..."

Nancy broke off. "But I really don't think I should be wasting your time with all these childhood gripes, Dr. Ballard. Especially since I know you have an engagement for this evening."

"That's just an informal dinner with a few old cronies. I have lots of time. Go right ahead. I'm interested."

NANCY paused, frowning a little. "The funny thing is," she continued, "I never understood why Beth hated me. It was as if she were intensely jealous. She was the successful one, the one who won the prizes and played the leads in the school shows and got the nicest presents and all the boys. But somehow each success made her worse. I've sometimes thought, Dr. Ballard, that only cruel people can be successful, that success is really a reward for cruelty...to someone."

Dr. Ballard knit his brows, might have nodded.

"The only thing I ever read that helped explain it to me," she went on, "was something in psychoanalysis. The idea that each of us has an equal dose of love and hate, and that it's our business to balance them off, to act in such a way that both have expression and yet so that the hate is always under the control of the love."

"But perhaps when the two people are very close together, as it is with twins, the balancing works out differently. Perhaps all the softness and love begins to gather in the one person and all the hardness and hate in the other. And then the hate takes the lead, because it's an emotion of violence and power and action - a concentrated emotion, not misty like love. And it keeps on and on, getting worse all the time, until it's so strong you feel it will never stop, not even with death."

"For it did keep on, Dr. Ballard, and it did get worse." Nancy looked at him closely. "Oh, I know that what I've been telling you isn't supposed to be so unusual among children. 'Little barbarians', people say, quite confident that they'll outgrow it. Quite convinced that wrist-twisting and pinching are things that

will automatically stop when children begin to grow up."

Nancy smiled thinly at him. "Well, they don't stop, Dr. Ballard. You know, it's very hard for most people to associate actual cruelty with an adolescent girl, maybe because of the way girls have been glorified in advertising. Yet I could write you a pretty chapter on just that topic. Of course a lot of it that happened in my case was what you'd call mental cruelty. I was shy and Beth had a hundred ways of embarrassing me. And if a boy became interested in me, she'd always take him away."

"I'd hardly have thought she'd have been able to," remarked Dr. Ballard.

"You think I'm good-looking? But I'm only good-looking in an odd way, and in any case it never seemed to count then. It's true, though, that twice there were boys who wouldn't respond to her invitations. Then both times she played a trick that only she could, because we were identical twins. She would pretend to be me - she could always imitate my manner and voice, even my reactions, precisely, though I couldn't possibly have imitated her - and then she would...do something that would make the boy drop me cold."

"Do something?"

Nancy looked down. "Oh, insult the boy cruelly, pretending to be me. Or else make some foul, boastful confession, pretending it was mine. If you knew how those boys loathed me afterwards..."

"But as I said, it wasn't only mental cruelty or indecent tricks. I remember nights when I'd done something to displease her and I'd gone to bed before her and she'd come in and I'd pretend to be asleep and after a while she'd say - oh, I know, Dr. Ballard, it sounds like something a silly little girl would say, but it didn't sound like that then, with my head under the sheet, pressed into the pillow, and her footsteps moving slowly around the bed - she'd say: 'I'm thinking of how to punish you.' And then there'd be a long wait, while I still pretended to be asleep, and then the touch...oh, Dr. Ballard, her hands! I was so afraid of her hands! But...what is it, Dr. Ballard?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"There's nothing much more to say. Except that Beth's cruelty and my fear went on until a year ago, when she died suddenly - I suppose you'd say tragically - of a blood clot on the brain. I've often

wondered since then whether her hatred of me, so long and cleverly concealed, mightn't have had something to do with it. Apoplexy's what haters die of, isn't it, doctor?

"I REMEMBER leaning over her bed the day she died, lying there paralyzed, with her beautiful face white and stiff as a fish's, one eye bigger than the other. I felt pity for her (You realize, doctor, don't you, that I always loved her?) but just then her hand flopped a little way across the blanket and touched mine, although they said she was completely paralyzed, and her big eye twitched around a little until it was looking almost at me and her lips moved and I thought I heard her say: 'I'll come back and punish you for this,' and then I felt her fingers moving, just a little, on my skin, as if they were trying to close on my wrist, and I jerked back with a cry.

"Mother was very angry with me for that. She thought I was just a selfish, thoughtless girl, afraid of death and unable to repress my fear even for my dying sister's sake. Of course I could never tell her the real reason. I've never really told that to anyone, except you. And now that I've told you I hardly know why I've done it."

She smiled nervously, quite unhumorously.

"Wasn't there something about a dream you had last night?" Dr. Ballard asked softly.

"Oh yes!" The listlessness snapped out of her. "I dreamed I was walking in an old graveyard with gnarly grey trees, and overhead the sky was grey and low and threatening, and everything was weird and dreadful. But somehow I was very happy. But then I felt a faint movement under my feet and I looked down at the grave I was passing and I saw the earth falling away into it. Just a little cone-shaped pit at first, with the dark sandy earth sliding down its sides, and a small black hole at the bottom. I knew I must run away quickly, but I couldn't move an inch. Then the pit grew larger and the earth tumbled down its sides in chunks and the black hole grew. And still I was rooted there. I looked at the gravestone beyond and it said 'Elizabeth Sawyer, 1926-48.' Then out of the hole came a hand and arm, only there were just shreds of dark flesh clinging to the bone, and it began to feel around with an awful, snatching swiftness.

Then suddenly the earth heaved and opened, and a figure came swiftly hitching itself up out of the hole. And although the flesh was green and shrunken and eaten and the eyes just holes, I recognized Beth - there was still the beautiful reddish hair. And then the ragged hand touched my ankle and instantly closed on it and the other hand came groping upward, higher, higher, and I screamed...and then I woke up."

NANCY was leaning forward, her eyes fixed on the doctor. Suddenly her hair seemed to bush out, just a trifle. Perhaps it had 'stood on end.' At any rate, she said, "Dr. Ballard, I'm frightened."

"I'm sorry if I've made you distress yourself," he said. The words were more reassuring than the tone of voice. He suddenly took her hand in his and for a few moments they sat there silently. Then she smiled and moved a little and said, "It's gone now. I've been very silly. I don't know why I told you all I did about Beth. It couldn't help you with my ankle."

"No, of course not," he said after a moment.

"Why did you ask if she was identical?"

He leaned back. His voice became brisker again. "I'll tell you about that right now - and about what the X-ray shows. I think there's a connection. As you probably know, Miss Sawyer, identical twins look so nearly alike because they come from the same germ cell. Before it starts to develop, it splits in two. Instead of one individual, two develop. That was what happened in the case of you and your sister." He paused. "But," he continued, "sometimes, especially if there's a strong tendency to twin births in the family, the splitting doesn't stop there. One of the two cells splits again. The result - triplets. I believe that also happened in your case."

Nancy looked at him puzzledly. "But then what happened to the third child?"

"The third sister," he amplified.

"There can't be identical boy-and-girl twins or triplets, you know, since sex is determined in the original germ cell. There, Miss Sawyer, we come to my second point. Not all twins develop and are actually born. Some start to develop and then stop."

"What happens to them?"

"Sometimes what there is of them is engulfed in the child that does develop completely - little fragments of a body,

bits of this and that, all buried in the flesh of the child that is actually born. I think that happened in your case."

Nancy looked at him oddly. "You mean I have in me bits of another twin sister, a triplet sister, who didn't develop?"

"Exactly."

"And that all this is connected with my ankle?"

"Yes."

"But then how -?"

"Sometimes nothing happens to the engulfed fragments. But sometimes, perhaps many years later, they begin to grow - in a natural way rather than malignantly. There are well-authenticated cases of this happening - as recently as 1890 a Mexican boy in this way 'gave birth' to his own twin brother, completely developed though of course dead. There's nothing nearly as extensive as that in your case, but I'm sure there is a pocket of engulfed materials around your ankle and that it recently started to grow, so gradually that you didn't notice it until the growth became so extensive as to be irritating."

Nancy eyed him closely. "What sort of materials? I mean the engulfed fragments."

HE HESITATED. "I'm not quite sure," he said. "The X-ray was...oh, such things are apt to be odd, though harmless stuff - teeth, hair, nails, you never can tell. We'll know better later."

"Could I see the X-ray?"

He hesitated again. "I'm afraid it couldn't mean anything to you. Just a lot of shadows."

"Could there be...other pockets of fragments?"

"It's not likely. And if there are, it's improbable they'll ever bother you." There was a pause.

Nancy said, "I don't like it."

"I don't like it," she repeated. "It's as if Beth had come back. Inside me."

The fragments have no connection with your dead sister," Dr. Ballard assured her. "They're not part of Beth, but of a third sister, if you can call such fragments a person."

"But those fragments only began to grow after Beth died. As if Beth's soul ... And was it my original cell that split a second time? - or was it Beth's? - so that it was the fragments of half her cell that I absorbed, so that..." She stopped. "I'm afraid I'm being silly again."

He looked at her for a while, then, with the air of someone snapping to attention, quickly nodded.

"But doctor," she said, also like someone snatching at practicality, "what's to happen now?"

"Well," he replied, "in order to get rid of this disfigurement to your ankle, a relatively minor operation will be necessary. You see, this sort of foreign body can't be reduced in size by heat or X-ray or injections. Surgery is needed, though probably only under local anaesthetic. Could you arrange to enter a hospital tomorrow? Then I could operate the next morning. You'd have to stay about four days."

She thought for a moment, then said, "Yes, I think I could manage that." She looked distastefully at her ankle. "In fact, I'd like to do it as soon as possible."

"Good. We'll ask Miss Snyder to arrange things."

When the nurse entered, she said, "Dr. Myers is outside."

"Tell him I'll be right along," Dr. Ballard said. "And then I'd like you to call Central Hospital. Miss Sawyer will take the reservation we got for Mrs. Phipps and were about to cancel." And they discussed details while Nancy pulled on stocking and shoe.

Nancy said goodbye and started for the waiting room, favouring her bad leg. Dr. Ballard watched her. The nurse opened the door. Beyond, Nancy's friend got up with a smile. There was now, besides her, a dark, oldish man in the waiting room.

As the nurse was about to close the door, Dr. Ballard said, "Miss Sawyer."

She turned. "Yes?"

"If your ankle should start to trouble you tonight - or anything else - please call me."

"Thank you, doctor, I will."

Dr. Ballard nodded. Then he called to his friend, "Be right with you." The dark, oldish man flapped an arm at him.

The door closed. Dr. Ballard went to his desk, took an X-ray photograph out of its brown envelope, switched on the light, studied the photograph incredulously.

He put it back in its envelope and on the desk. He got his hat and overcoat from the closet. He turned out the light. Then suddenly he went back and got the envelope, stuffed it in his pocket, and went out.

THE dinner with Dr. Myers and three other old professional friends proved if anything more enjoyable than Dr. Ballard had anticipated. It led to relaxation, gossip, a leisurely evening stroll, a drink together, a few final yarns. At one point Dr. Ballard felt a fleeting impulse to get the X-ray out of his overcoat pocket and show it to them and tell his little yarn about it, but something made him hesitate, and he forgot the idea. He felt very easy in his mind as he drove home about midnight. He even hummed a little. This mood was not disturbed until he saw the face of Miss Willis, his resident secretary.

"What is it?" he asked crisply.

"Miss Nancy Sawyer. She..." For once the imperturbable, greying blonde seemed to have difficulty speaking.

"Yes?"

"She called up first about an hour and a half ago."

"Her ankle had begun to pain her?"

"She didn't say anything about her ankle. She said she was getting a sore throat."

"What!"

"It seemed unimportant to me, too, though of course I told her I'd inform you when you got in. But she seemed rather frightened, kept complaining of this tightness she felt in her throat..."

"Yes? Yes?"

"So I agreed to get in touch with you immediately. She hung up. I called the restaurant, but you'd just left. Then I called Dr. Myers' home, but didn't get any answer. I told the operator to keep trying."

"About a half hour ago Miss Sawyer's friend, a Marge Hudson, called. She said Miss Sawyer had gone to bed and was apparently asleep, but she didn't like the way she was tossing around, as if she were having a particularly bad dream, and especially she didn't like the noises she was making in her throat, as if she were having difficulty breathing. She said she had looked closely at Miss Sawyer's throat as she lay sleeping, and it seemed swollen. I told her I was making every effort to get in touch with you and we left it at that."

"That wasn't all?"

"No." Miss Willis' agitation returned. "Just two minutes before you arrived, the phone rang again. At first the line seemed to be dead. I was about to hang up. Then I began to hear a clicking, gurgling

sound. Low at first, but then it grew louder. Then suddenly it broke free and whooped out in what I think was Miss Sawyer's voice. There were only two words, I think, but I couldn't catch them because they were so loud they stopped the phone. After that, nothing, although I listened and listened and kept saying 'hello' over and over. But, Dr. Ballard, that gurgling sound! It was as if I were listening to someone being strangled, very slowly, very, very..."

But Dr. Ballard had grabbed up his surgical bag and was racing for his car. He drove rather well for a doctor and, tonight, very fast. He was about three blocks from the river when he heard a siren, ahead of him.

NANCY Sawyer's apartment hotel was at the end of a short street terminated by a high concrete curb and metal fence and, directly below, the river. Now there was a fire engine drawn up to the fence and playing a searchlight down over the edge through the faintly misty air. Dr. Ballard could see a couple of figures in shiny black coats beside the searchlight. As he jumped out of his car he could hear shouts and what sounded like the motor of a launch. He hesitated for a moment, then ran into the hotel.

The lobby was empty. There was no one behind the counter. He ran to the open elevator. It was an automatic. He punched the twenty-three button.

On that floor there was one open door in the short corridor. Marge Hudson met him inside it.

"She jumped?"

The girl nodded. "They're hunting for her body. I've been watching. Come on."

She led him to a dark bedroom. There was a studio couch, its covers disordered, and beside it a phone. River air was pouring in through a large, hinged window, open wide. They went to it and looked down. The circling launch looked like a toy boat. Its searchlight and that from the fire engine roved across the dark water. Shouts and chugging came up faintly.

"How did it happen?" he asked the girl at the window.

"I was watching her as she lay in bed," Marge Hudson answered without looking around. "About twenty minutes after I called your home, she seemed to be getting worse. She had more trouble breathing. I tried to wake her, but couldn't. I went to the kitchen to make an ice pack. It

took longer than I'd thought. I heard a noise that at first I didn't connect with Nancy. Then I realized that she was strangling. I rushed back. Just then she screamed out horribly. I heard something fall - I think it was the phone - and footsteps and the window opening. When I came in she was standing on the sill in her nightdress, clawing at her throat. Before I could get to her, she jumped."

"Earlier in the evening she'd complained of a sore throat?"

"Yes. She said, jokingly, that the trouble with her ankle must be spreading to her throat. After she called your home and couldn't get you, she took some aspirin and went to bed."

Dr. Ballard switched on the lamp by the bed. He pulled the brown envelope from his coat pocket, took out the X-ray and held it up against the light.

"You say she screamed at the end," he said in a not very steady voice. "Were there any definite words?"

The girl at the window hesitated. "I'm not sure," she said slowly. "They were suddenly choked off, exactly as if a hand had tightened around her throat. But I think there were two words. 'Hand' and 'Beth.'"

Dr. Ballard's gaze flickered toward the mocking face in the photograph on the chest of drawers, then back to the ghostly black and whites of the one in his hands. His arms were shaking.

"They haven't found her yet," Marge said, still looking down at the river and the circling launch.

Dr. Ballard was staring incredulously at the X-ray, as if by staring he could make what he saw go away. But that was impossible. It was a perfectly defined and unambiguous exposure.

There, in the X-ray's black and greys, he could see the bones of Nancy Sawyer's ankle and, tightly clenched around them, deep under skin and flesh, the slender bones of a human hand.

No introduction is really needed here for one of the finest genre writers around, be it fantasy, supernatural horror or science fiction. Fritz Leiber sold his first story to *Unknown* in 1939 and he has subsequently won almost every major award going. His recent collection *The Ghost Light* (Berkley) included his revealing autobiographical essay, *Not Much Disorder and Not So Early Sex*, and he contributes regular columns to *Locust* and *Fantasy Review*. He tells us that current work includes another Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser story, with a seventh volume of their adventures in mind; Fritz notes that *Weird Tales* refused to publish any of the original yarns in that renowned sword & sorcery series. As a result, he came up with a number of medical horror tales, of which, he says, *In the X-Ray* was probably the best. It first appeared in *Weird Tales* in July 1949...



HORRIFIC REVELATIONS IN AN ATTIC...

AFTER THE FUNERAL

By HUGH B. CAVE

in the next issue



"The flames inside seemed to laugh at her."

Amorous of the Far

By FRANCES GARFIELD

Illustration by ALAN HUNTER

*Be not too wildly amorous of the far,
Nor lure thy fantasy to its utmost
scope.*

- Walter de la Mare.

DORSEY lingered at the breakfast table. She dipped a long carmine-tipped forefinger into the syrup left by the pancakes and licked at it. "Good," she thought and gave a little shiver of pleasure. Her delicately modelled head dipped over the plate, dragging her long hair, golden as the syrup, into the plate, coating a tress with a sugary film.

"There's so much to learn about myself," she thought. "And my only help is Professor Meratel." This tall gaunt man lived down the street in a tall, narrow house which sat in dull respectability before a tiny building which he lovingly called his laboratory. The Professor spent much time in the little lab. There he made the class preparations for his students at the University and performed secret experiments which seemed to give him much pleasure.

But in addition to this professional life, the Professor found time each day to visit Dorsey. He seemed to know so much about her. Meratel had told her that her memory had been lost in a fiery accident that had destroyed her parents and left her alone in the world. She asked him once if he was her guardian. He had laughed and said, "I really like the word mentor better. But I did help to set up your trust fund."

Dorsey received money from the Guarantee Title and Trust on the first day of every month. Just enough to keep her comfortably if she took care. This was her trust fund. The Professor helped her with the book-keeping chores. And he told her about the accident a little bit at a time. How she had been travelling with her family when their car had been hit and burned to ashes. A passer-by had pulled her free, but she had been in hospital a very long time. The professor had found her there

and helped nurse her back to health.

There were days when Dorsey resented this kindly man and hated his knowing so much about her. And sometimes she worried about how little she herself remembered and wondered if she were really right in the head. Such a pretty head, but so unreliable.

As she sat day-dreaming, flames rose high into the sky at Kelly's Garage over on the next block. She cringed and hid her eyes. Then scolded herself. "Don't look," she thought. "Turn away."

Hurriedly she left the kitchen to put on her face as she liked to say. She looked into the mirror with blue eyes the colour of a rain-swept sky and brows shaped like little wings. "Not bad," she thought. But a little makeup never hurts. So she applied colour from various pots and a bit of translucent powder to set it all nicely. And she was ready to look at things outside.

The sun shone brilliantly in the sky and the old maple trees met overhead to paint mottled shadows on the street. Dorsey became her happy self once again - and would welcome the sight of the Professor coming for a visit.

She gathered up a handful of paper money and stuffed it into her purse. Enough to buy a few things at the store. She must not be extravagant with her allowance from the Guarantee Title and Trust. She went outside with a real hope that the Professor would be coming down the street exactly as usual.

The Professor made a comfortable and soothing father figure for Dorsey and their walks together had become a habit. He taught Investigative Science at the University and enjoyed being with young people. He maintained that with their inquisitive minds they were more interesting than that at any other time. One day he said, "You must remember that I have no children. Spoil me a little bit. It does no harm. Let me look after you."

His big brown eyes had looked so pers-

uasive that Dorsey could not refuse.
"O.K. Just don't overdo it."

So they walked together. They would walk from Dorsey's cottage down into the village. Often they stopped for cup of coffee or a glass of beer.

One day their path took them past Kelly's Garage and Dorsey discovered Buck Riggs. There he crouched powerfully to change a tyre. The play of his muscles and the concentration on his heavily boned face stunned Dorsey.

There was a man.

Later when the Professor said to her, "I love our daily walks," she agreed with him wholeheartedly. For ever after she would coax him to direct the walk past Kelly's Garage. She even began to drive her little car that way, just to catch a glimpse of Buck.

When she saw the hugely-muscled man build a tower of tyres and set it afire, she could barely restrain herself from running to pull him away from the flames. Away from danger.

Dorsey's memory played strange tricks, so that every time she saw fire at Kelly's Garage she thought it was that first time that she had watched Buck set it, and she trembled with fear. The Professor needed his most soothing methods to quiet her. "The doctors say you will be all right one day. Do not worry."

All her other needs seemed to fade beside her need for Buck. "I don't think he has even seen me yet," she thought. She decided to make Buck see her by having a very sick car - the tyres would need air, the battery would need checking, it wouldn't start in the morning. Anything that could happen would happen.

When she drove up for air in her tyres, Buck was busy at the other end of the lot and Kelly filled them. When her horn stuck because she kept her finger on the button, Kelly ran out. All very strange, since other men than Buck seemed to find Dorsey attractive. She had spent some time discouraging the young men students who visited the Professor. And strange men often ogled her on the street. But Buck? No.

"Professor, will you do me a favour?" the young woman asked one evening. "You've taught me so much. But it's mostly about stars and such things. I need something interesting to talk about."

"Oh, I see. It's small talk you're looking for. Right?" Professor Meratel smiled paternally at her.

"Yes, I guess that's it," she agreed.

Sometimes Dorsey had a feeling that she was just a little marionette and somebody was pulling strings to make her what she was. Almost as if somebody was dreaming her. Maybe a little lively conversation would help her confidence. She had studied the models on TV and worked to make herself look like them, but there was always something lacking. Maybe it was that small talk the Professor had mentioned. O.K. She'd give it a try.

"Ghosts and magic are pretty popular," she smiled bewitchingly at the Professor. "Have you any books like that?"

"Umm," he said thoughtfully.

EARLY the next morning, Professor Meratel came to her house. "Here, my dear," he said with his gentle smile. "Maybe this will amuse you." He held a small, grey, tattered paperback book. She reached for it eagerly.

"Come now, little one. It's not all that great." He looked down at her with serious brown eyes. "It's a book of magic. I don't for one moment believe in it and I hope you don't. But it may amuse you."

The instant the Professor left, Dorsey opened the book. Her fingers trembled. She turned pages rapidly. There. She found a spell. **HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF BOLD AND AMIABLE:** *The stone called Aetorius is to be found in the crows of any old capon. He who wears such a stone on his neck will always remain bold and beloved by all mankind.*

Impossible. Old capon indeed. How could she find such a stone? Or old capon?

She continued to turn the pages. There, on page 72, she found another spell. Workable, this one. A little like Adam and Eve. It required an apple - a perfectly shaped red apple, carefully polished - and a strong gift of persuasion to coax Buck to eat it. A spell to be muttered while polishing the apple - *Sunady-Delato* - to be repeated again and again as she rubbed the apple to a rosy sheen. And think. Think positive thoughts, strong thoughts of love and desire for Buck. He would respond. He must.

Dorsey dressed quickly and rushed to town to search for the prettiest apples. She passed Kelly's Garage just as a strange woman handed Buck a brown paper bag. Probably lunch. She stopped. Breath suspended. Instead of going home, she would follow that woman and find out who she was. "Can Buck be married? Oh, no. It can't be,"

she assured herself.

Bile rose in her throat. Her ears pounded. She had tasted jealousy.

Dorsey ran her pink tongue around her dry lips. She must find out who the woman was. She must. The slovenly woman in her shapeless gingham dress did not make Dorsey's task easy. She trudged slowly from store to store - the bank, the butcher shop, the vegetable market. At last she turned toward home. To a small, neat cottage, not far from the garage. The lawn was beautifully manicured and pretty flowers sprouted everywhere. It must keep Buck busy. Dorsey wondered about the inside of the house. But that would have to wait. She might get the courage to break in one day when the house was empty, when the woman was doing her marketing.

DORSEY'S determination to make Buck notice her was fed by her jealousy of the strange woman. The next morning she found a ready-made reason to seek his attention. When she went outside to start her little car, she discovered that the dome light had perished.

Professor Meratel appeared, ambling down the street on his early morning walk. His clothes hung even more loosely on his gaunt frame, as if he had lost much weight. "He works too hard," thought Dorsey. His worry frown was dug deep between those somber brown eyes.

"Good morning, my dear," he greeted her in his precisely articulated tones. "Trouble with your car? Maybe I can help."

"It's only my dome light," Dorsey told him and gave him a smile as false as her curly black eyelashes.

"Kelly's mechanic can easily fix that," he assured her. "It's probably just a burnt-out fuse. I'd do it for you if I had the right part."

"Thanks. But it's all right. I have to go to town anyway. And Kelly's is right on the way."

She ran into the house and painted on a fresh coral mouth and put blue shadows around her eyes so like a freshly washed sky. She searched out her tightest skirt and admired her rounded hips. Her blouse was teasingly low and she anticipated Buck's reaction to her richly-swelling breasts. "Look out, Buck," she thought. "Here I come."

She composed a song as she drove along:

"I'm gonna get my man
Any way I can,
An' if he tries to run

It'll jus' be more fun
For me, my friend,
to catch my man
is the whole god damn piece of
cake..."

The car stopped at Kelly's Garage. With a soft tissue, Dorsey rubbed the specially prepared apple one more time. "Sunady-Delato," she whispered over it, huskily.

Mr. Kelly opened the car door and greeted her. "Is Buck in?" she asked silkily. "My dome light won't turn on."

Buck strode powerfully toward the car. She stepped out, her skirt climbing high. She gave him the undershot look that was guaranteed to charm. He didn't notice.

He didn't see her skirt draw tight around her hips as she bent. He didn't see her lovely round bosom almost spill free of the blouse as she stretched to point at the light. But Dorsey would not believe. She assured herself that his cheeks coloured a bit. It must be true. He was male. He was very male. And she was beautiful.

Buck quickly fixed the light and showed her that it worked.

With long delicate fingers, Dorsey pulled the shiny red apple from her big handbag and handed it to him with a brilliant smile.

"Here, Buck. This was a present from some mountain friends. They're wonderfully good apples. "You'll love it with your lunch."

He took it awkwardly in his greasy hands. Her kitten smile came again. "Vitamins. It's full of them."

And she drove away. Now he must come to her. The apple would be the irresistible force. She felt content and thoroughly pleased with herself.

A VELVET curtain of darkness fell early. Dorsey paced her living room. Then her little garden. She couldn't sit still. Would he come? Would the charm work?

That old feeling of being manipulated returned. How she wished that the puller-of-strings, if indeed he existed, could help her. Would it help if she prayed? If only she knew how to begin. That was one thing the Professor had neglected to teach her.

Once more she refreshed her makeup. She studied herself in the mirror for flaws. She had done a good job. No flaws.

At the front door, there came a fumbling almost apologetic knock.

She sprang to her feet. Then hesitated. "Patience," she scolded herself. "Take it easy." Deliberately, she opened the door.

There stood Buck. Tremendous. Still in his soiled work clothes. How big he was.

Was that someone standing across the street watching her house? Well, it didn't matter. The only thing of importance was that Buck had come.

She pulled the giant man inside and closed the door.

She flung her arms around his big neck. Drew him tightly to her - to feel every curve and bump of him. She massaged the back of his head.

"Come," she said, and pulled him to the chaise-lounge. "Let's sit here together and have some cool lemonade."

She lifted the crystal pitcher from the table and poured him a glass full. "Synady-Delato," she murmured over it. "Hear me Buck?"

Without warning, he seized her violently. The glass went flying. He stared, eyes glazed. He flung her down, overwhelmed her, possessed her without a word, a pause - a thought for her. She was shocked - ashamed.

Then he was up on his feet backing away. "I've gotta go," he stammered. "Bertha will wonder where I am."

He fled out into the night as though hypnotized.

Left alone, Dorsey clenched her fists in fury. "Oh, God. The spell backfired. I wanted love. I got rape. And he worried about that Bertha. Why?" She began sobbing.

"Bertha," Dorsey cried out into the empty room. Now she had a name. At the very least a name. But was she a wife? A housekeeper? A relative? "Please God. Don't let him be married."

The stricken girl paced the floor of her living room until a rosy dawn crept in at the window. She sorrowed that she had not been better taught. Professor Meratel had tried. He had taught her much - but not enough about the real world. "Think of me as your mentor," he had said. An interesting word. But lover was so much a better one.

The long day passed. Evening came. Professor Meratel came knocking at her door. The two sat on the porch and the good old scientist pointed out stars and told Dorsey their names. His voice soothed her tattered nerves. She had read the books by Sir James Jeans that Dr. Meratel had brought to her and it was good to hear

their names and look at them in the velvet sky. She sat quietly and thought of new ways of entrapment for Buck with one part of her mind.

"A colleague is coming to visit," the Professor said. "I very much want you to meet him, Dorsey. His name is Dr. Margolis Drake and we've worked together on some very interesting projects."

He smiled paternally at Dorsey. "I'd like to see you turn your charm on him. They say he's totally immune to female beauty. But if I were a betting man, I'd bet that you could make him notice you."

"O.K.," she agreed. "But wait until later. I have an important errand tomorrow."

The familiar drone of the Professor's voice had led her to remember the witch Zora Harkey. People called her a witch. But the University crowd said there was no such thing. However, Dorsey decided to visit Zora and find out just what kind of person she was. Maybe she was the very help Dorsey needed.

"It's late," said the Professor. "We need our rest. I want you to impress Dr. Drake. We'll pick you up and we'll have a late dinner."

"Yes. Sure," agreed Dorsey dreamily. For by then Zora would have solved her problem. She would have some sort of dependable love charm. Surely.

Dorsey slept well, convinced that help was near. She did not worry about her poor memory, her almost total lack of knowledge of her childhood, her fear of fire. Anything. Expert help was near. She could think of her beauty and enticing smile. What if she did not know her I.Q. or her parents' faces? What if she feared fire so dreadfully? The Professor had assured her that all would straighten out for her one day if she would only stop worrying. And so she slept.

AT SUNRISE Dorsey nibbled dry toast and sipped black coffee. When she felt it was proper for a circumspect young woman to visit a circumspect young witch, she got into her car and set out. Zora Harkey lived at the edge of town. Some people feared her. Others respected her and called her a good witch - a white witch. Dorsey could barely wait to meet her.

It was a pleasant morning. The leaves were bathed with dew and shone emerald green. Was fairyland like this? Just ahead lived Zora, in a house tucked into such a thicket of trees that it couldn't

be seen from the road. Dorsey parked her car and walked up a bush-thronged path to the front porch.

There sat Zora on the steps spooning up porridge and rich cream for her breakfast. Birds were watching and snatched at occasional bits of oatmeal which she threw to them. A huge ginger cat sat regally on the top step like a soft pillow. Zora wore huge thickly-lensed glasses which distorted her silver-grey eyes. Her smile was friendly.

"Hello," she said. "Well. You're the last thing I expected to see in my yard today."

"Why?" asked Dorsey, bewildered. "Was it because I only decided last night?"

"Oh, several reasons," Zora said, smiling broadly. "You haven't gone unnoticed, my dear. But since you're here you must have a problem."

Dorsey stared. This certainly was a handsome witch. Young. And she was so polite.

"I'm a white witch," Zora explained. "I like to help wherever I can. You're in love, though you try to hide it. But you can't. You know that."

"It's eating me up," Dorsey burst out. "He won't even look at me."

"Aren't all good men hard to get?"

"Please help me get him. I found out where he lives. And I know where he works."

"Fifty dollars, please," said Zora.

This did not surprise Dorsey. She opened her capacious bag and brought out five ten dollar bills from the money the Guarantee Title and Trust had sent to her. Zora watched with quiet interest and held out a slender hand for the money. She counted it quickly and thrust the bills into the front of her dress.

Immediately Dorsey poured out her story.

All about Buck - the rich muscles, the beautiful curly hair, the coldness, the neat little cottage, the calling out to Bertha. Who was she? Dorsey had been eavesdropping at grocery stores and drug stores to hear what she could. But she really knew nothing. "Surely there is something you can do," she finally pleaded. "You know so much."

"I know one thing that is almost guaranteed to work," Zora finally said. "It can be done if you just drop a bit of your menstrual fluid into Buck's liquor. But of course that's impossible for you."

"How do you know that?" asked Dorsey, almost in tears.

"Oh, there's a great deal I know. And one thing I can tell you for pretty sure is that Bertha is not Buck's wife - else I wouldn't help you."

Zora studied Dorsey for what seemed an eternity. She looked steadily into her big blue eyes. "You know, you're not at all bad looking," she said at last. "Just let me think."

The little witch pulled off her bottle-bottom spectacles and stared at the ground beneath her for a while. Dorsey peered into the branches of an oak tree heavy with mistletoe. Or was it witch's broom? A grey and black butterfly hovered in and around the leaves of the salt cedar. And Dorsey saw that the large ginger cat had followed her and was quietly watching something high in its branches.

Zora put down her porridge bowl and rose to wander about in the herb garden with all its mysterious growths. Dark looming plants hovered in frightening dense clusters.

Dorsey watched, fascinated, trusting. Zora returned to the porch. She held in her hand a tiny green three-leaved sprig with little pinkish flowers.

"Here, my dear. Here is something for you. This is *Vervain*, a very old plant - a favourite of witches and magicians. We call it *Verbena*. Put it in your pocket and sew the pocket up. Keep it with you at all times. If you change clothes, sew it into those. This - together with your beauty - should help you greatly."

"I must be certain this time. This sounds a bit chancey."

"All right. I'll give you a follow-up. Something to deposit in Buck's own home. You must find a way to get into his house. So that it will greet him in the morning and set his mood for the day."

Zora carried her bowl into the house. She returned outside with something sooty black in her hand. She handed it to Dorsey. It was a short, squat candle. What did Freud say about candles, wondered Dorsey? The Professor had talked about Freud.

"Put the candle in Buck's room. Here are magic words for you to learn. Think them. Write them on a slip of paper. Light the candle and burn the paper in the flame. Remember these words. *Alp sulb min walkom apsa bal*. Let the ashes fall. Snuff out the candle flame and leave. The candle must stay behind to do its work."

Dorsey thanked Zora and rose to leave. The ginger cat moved from his post under the salt cedar and rubbed gently against

Zora's legs. She scratched him under the chin.

Afternoon finally arrived.

Dorsey parked her car across the street from Buck's cottage. She waited. One cigarette after another she smoked until her mouth tasted dry and foul, until the car's ashtray overflowed. She waited for Buck's house to empty.

Then at last Bertha came out, geared for the day's errands. A big shopping bag dangled from her plump arm. She tested the door to check the automatic lock. Then she trudged down the street, dabbing at her untidy brown hair with pudgy fingers. Around the corner she plodded, toward the A&P.

Smiling a greedy, self-assured smile, Dorsey got out of the car. She hurried across the street and went up the steps of the neat little cottage. The door was latched, but Dorsey knew the trick with a credit card. She found the large crack and inserted the card at the bolt and fiddled around only a moment before the flimsy lock yielded. Dorsey entered. The little living room was tidy. Whoever Bertha might be, she was certainly a good housekeeper.

On a shelf stood a pretty blue pottery bowl. Dorsey took it down and carried it into the bedroom. She put it on the side table next to the window. She extracted the black candle from her purse. It looked balefully sinister. Her hand trembled. She held the flame of her cigarette lighter to the wick until a few drops of smudgy wax trickled into the bowl. She stuck the candle in and held it until the droplets caught and gripped it.

A little doubt prickled her mind. "Is this little stub of candle and a few magic words going to be enough?" she wondered. On impulse she took the *Vervain* from her bra. It felt dry and brittle and the flowers were losing their pinkish colour; but it must still hold magic power. She carefully tucked the leaves into the bowl, almost filling it to the wick of the candle.

"I hope Professor Meratel never hears about this," she thought.

She held her cigarette lighter to the candle wick to light it. It resisted stubbornly. No light. Again she tried. All at once she realized that she had never lighted a candle because of her fear of fire. But overcome that fear she must. She persisted. Finally the wick caught.

From her purse she pulled the bit of paper with the magic words written on it. She stared hard at *Alp sulb min walkom apsa bal* and thought of Buck. She held the tip of the paper to the candle. It flared up brilliantly, hot in her hand. Just then a breeze caught the fluffy ruffle of the curtain and blew it across the bowl. She jumped. Everything turned over. A flame raced up the filmy curtain. She grabbed a pillow and beat at the curtain, but the flames only flicked and climbed. A strong puff of wind entered the room. She grabbed at the bowl. It was hot and fell from her hand onto the bed. She beat at it with a pillow.

Suddenly flames seemed to be everywhere. Whatever she did they only seemed to spread. Everything was so fragile. Bright crimson flowers sprouted around her. Dorsey felt the heat on her face.

"I must get out. Let the house burn. Get away. Get out of here. They mustn't find me here. They'll blame me. What will they do to me?"

She rushed to the door and through it. Her flying skirt was caught by the closing door. It was caught tightly and held there.

She screamed, and clutched at the knob to twist it open. The door was jammed on the skirt fabric. Again she screamed. The flames inside seemed to laugh at her. She heard a beating on the door like waves at the seashore. Then the heat rose about her and strangled her into silence.

THE fire trucks arrived in time to save the house, or most of it. The bedroom had been gutted. Buck Riggs was outside, thanking God at the top of his lungs that his mother hadn't been inside. The mother he had always called Bertha.

The firemen thought they had found a body in the house. But it had been only a metal framework, most skillfully put together, much like a human skeleton. Maybe it had been some sort of statue. Modern. They threw a blanket over it and left it to lie in the front yard.

PROFESSOR Meratel and his colleague Dr. Margolis Drake had come to see the fire, so near the backyard lab. The Professor lifted the blanket, then quickly dropped it. "Dorsey," he said shakily. "The end of her. My best work." A tear rolled down his cheek.

"I know. Best so far," said Drake, his hand on Meratel's arm. "I know how you

worked to create her... Not just a robot body, but - almost a daughter to you."

"I really cared for her," Meratel looked gaunter than ever. "She had all the elements - she was as close to human as any of us have come so far," he said. "I built her. I taught her. Not only could she think, she could feel. That was my mistake - too much feeling, too little control. She had the human impulses and appetites. Not perfect, but they were there."

"You sound as if you loved her."

"Yes. Why not? She was my child. I gave her all those traits. I just left out that all-important element - character."

"Come on, old friend," said Drake with his arm on the Professor's shoulder.

"Leave this place. We'll work on a new model. Find out how to improve on this one."

"How?" repeated Professor Meratel wretchedly.

Frances Garfield's stories *Don't Open That Door* and *The Elementals* appeared in *Fantasy Tales*' 5 and 6 respectively. If you didn't already know it, Frances is Mrs. Manly Wade Wellman (see *The Cauldron* this issue), and though by no means as prolific as her husband, she has turned out a number of highly readable fantasy stories over the years and was an original contributor to the legendary pulp *Weird Tales*. We are pleased to welcome Frances back to our pages with a new tale, *Amorous of the Far*...



Book of the Dead

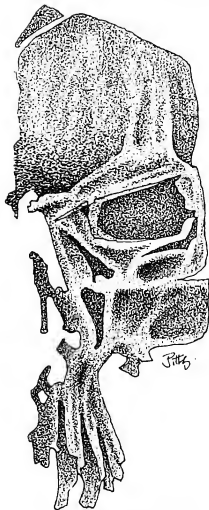
By JOEL LANE

Names of the nameless, written by dead hands,
Echoing in the labyrinth of mind,
Calling to sunken, wilderness waste lands,
Reaching with shadows over eyes long blind.
Only the living answer for the dead,
Never possessing what the dead perceive;
Only invoking in that black light's stead
Mastery of the threads that wizards weave.
In the world's graveyard mapped by these mad spells,
Cthulhu waits for worshippers; inflamed
Oracles bellow through the seven hells
Names of the nameless, spoken by the named.

The Terminus

By KIM NEWMAN

Illustration by JIM PITTS



"Some people never do turn up."

THEY had me spend my first month out of training processing statements. It was more like public relations than police work. Nobody the desk sergeant passed on to me was ever going to see any action arising from their complaint. It was my job to give them a polystyrene cup of coffee and politely explain that playing in a public playground was not an offence. The desk sergeant didn't approve of the Metropolitan Police Graduate Entry scheme which had given me the rank of inspector over him; so I had to deal with all the nutters in Holborn. They felt more comfortable surrounded by blue serge and had vintage stories about martians in the plumbing. Most were satisfied just to get their loony notions on police notepaper. I filed all the statements, but they might as well have been shredded.

By the time Judyth Staines was sent to my strip-lit cubicle the novelty had gone. I'd learned all the pigeon holes: She was an Overly Nervous Missing Persons Reporter. She wore her hair in purple tentacles, insisted on the 'y', and had a cheery *Kill a Pig Today* patch on her jump suit. The disappearer was Robert Webb, the bass guitarist of a band called Slug Death. Ms. Staines had last seen Webb in Goodge Street underground station at about a quarter past ten the previous night. He had bought (I wrote 'purchased' in the statement) a ticket for Belsize Park and vanished into the lifts. Ms. Staines had stayed in town 'to see someone' (cockney rhyming slang for 'buy drugs') and had later taken the tube to Belsize Park herself. She'd arrived at eleven and found the rest of Slug Death, still waiting for Webb. "And since then he hasn't been back to our place, or rung up, or anything."

Ms. Staines had been up all night. Her charcoal eyeshadow had trickled, giving her that zombie look. She was not happy in a police station. She kept look-

ing around nervously, like the leading lady of a psycho movie exploring an old dark house where, fifteen years before, an entire girls' basketball team had been fed into a giant kitchen blender by a family of demented fast food freaks. I gave her the Telly Savalas speech about calming down, waiting a few days, and not being too worried because: Although people sometimes disappear they usually turn up with a perfectly logical explanation.

"It's hard to explain without you knowing him. Bobby wasn't just about to disappear. We were going to party. He had the bottle. He wasn't strung out, or hung up, or anything. He was just normal."

I asked if she could give a description.

"You can't miss him. He has blue horns."

I thought of a funny remark, but kept it to myself.

"He had most of his hair off, and the rest shaped like horns. He dyed them blue."

After another month of statement processing I would have let Webb disappear on his own, but I still had a perverse feeling that being a policeman was all about kicking doors in and getting results. During the next martian cease fire I asked around, and ended up at New Scotland Yard. I found Eric Verdon, the liaison between the Metropolitan Police and the London Transport Police, in the smaller of his two offices. The other was filled with eighteen tons of documentation, all the way back to horse-drawn trams.

"Oh yes," Verdon told me, "disappearances from the underground are not uncommon. Every once in a while some unfortunate wanders off where he shouldn't and meets with an accident. Sometimes our staff doesn't come across the remains for years. Some people never do turn up. Those are the most interesting, I think. This pile.

It was an impressive stack of manila folders. On the night of October the ninth, 1872 (which I like to think of as appropriately foggy) Mr. Julian Selwyn-Pitt, a landscape painter, walked into Oxford Street station and was never seen again. Since 1872 fifteen thousand, eight hundred and twenty-four people had followed Mr. Selwyn-Pitt into Verdon's files. The figure was exclusive of all those

whose disappearance was never reported and those, like Robert Webb, whose folders had not yet drifted down to settle in Verdon's office.

"So there are nearly sixteen thousand people lying around the tube somewhere?"

"Presumably. Over the years whole sections have been closed off, reopened, caved in or forgotten. Even our maps are nowhere near complete. There are plenty of nooks and crannies that could comfortably accomodate a missing person. I often think of sardines."

"Pardon?"

"The game. You must have played it as a child. It's like hide-and-seek, only when you find someone you have to hide with them. I always found it unnerving somehow. You'd start with a house full of children, and then one by one they'd vanish. Finally you'd pull back the curtain and there they all would be, packed in like sardines, waiting for you. I'm sure it's like that down there. Somewhere there's a hidey-hole full of all those people."

All my deductive prowess could make of that was that Verdon had been filed away for too long and faded out himself. The Singular Case of the Blue-Horned Vanisher remained unsolved. The traditional next step was an inspection of the scene of the crime. After the evening shift I had a couple of shorts to nerve me for my first foray into independent detection.

Goode Street tube station is one of the deepest in London. It has polite robot lifts whose vocabulary is limited to "please stand clear of the doors," and a rude nightwatchman whose speech is limited to an incomprehensible Jamaican patois. I used my police identification to borrow a lantern, but the nightwatchman's presence was required elsewhere for some important swearing and snoozing. I suspected that he did not want to slip into Verdon's fifteen thousand, eight hundred and twenty-seventh manila folder. The lifts had shut off for the night. I had to go down a spiral staircase, lit by off-white Christmas tree bulbs.

I was conducting my search on the Whinnie the Pooh principle of looking for a thing lost by losing myself and thus ending up next to the original object. When I passed the third PUBLIC NOT ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT notice I decided to chuck it in. Ms. Staines would finally wash her hair and marry an acc-

ountant anyway.

I was a couple of levels below the actual railway tunnel and had succeeded in getting lost. Here were the catacombs where broken spades, long-handled brooms, buckets of sand, mops, antiquated ticket machines, lost uniform caps, and stray umbrellas drag themselves to die.

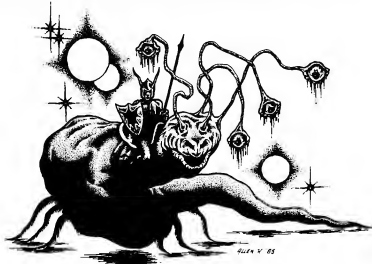
I found a locker full of tin hats and gas masks. A rusted 1930s sandwich box, complete with a green hairy lunch wrapped in pre-cellophane tracing paper. And quiet, no rumbling trains at night. Only the inevitable underground ear-cracking drip. It was a standing tap steadily leaking onto a bale of the *Chronicle*. Prams, bedsteads, army blankets, enamel basins, a rocking horse. After the public library tiling gave way to bare bricks there wasn't even any Persian graffiti or football propaganda. Everything terminated here.

The damp kept the air clean. Verdon's files had been musty, but here the

chilly air had a sweet afterscent. I sucked in a lungful, drawing the wind over my tongue, but couldn't catch the taste. I meandered without urgency in search of an EXIT. The drip was gone. The corridors were smooth and empty. The calm of a sea bed during a storm. Nothing mattered. Through tunnels, down corkscrew stairs, past uninteresting junctions, at random into empty storerooms. I opened a brassbound door.

The hall was lit blue. The sweetness was stronger, soft yet slowing. There were more of them than I could count. Some pale faces turned without interest. An old man in a frock coat and a wing collar, a stocky type in a khaki sergeant's uniform, a girl in a miniskirt and stiletto heels. Ulsters, bustles, Norfolk jackets, overalls, flat caps, pinstripes, kaftans, black leather jackets, denims. They weren't dead or alive. Just waiting.

Kim Newman is a freelance writer, film critic and broadcaster, and *The Terminus* marks his first appearance in *Fantasy Tales*. He used to play the kazoo in a vaudeville band, but he has given that up. His film criticism has appeared in *City Limits*, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, *Sight and Sound*, *Stills* and *Shook Xpress*, and he has published two science fiction stories in *Interzone* (one of which was reprinted in *Interzone The 1st Anthology*). He is the author of *Nightmare Movies*, a critical history of the horror film since 1968, and co-compiler of *Ghastly Beyond Belief*, the science fiction and fantasy book of quotations. Recently, he has been working on a musical, *The Gold Diggers of 1986* and a horror novel, *Bad Dreams*, which will be very violent. He lives in London's Muswell Hill, which doesn't have a tube station.



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Shadrezzar

By PHIL EMERY

Illustration by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

I RODE a lost, untrodden lane,
Free from sorrow, dread, or pain,
And never thought the road might aim
To Damnèd Shadrezzar.

Along that path a dancer skipped,
A strange and joyous caper tripped,
As from a gibbet freshly ripped.
He leapt and cartwheeled swift and hard
And came in grey and grisly garb,
And to my heart flew fear's barb
On the road to Shadrezzar.

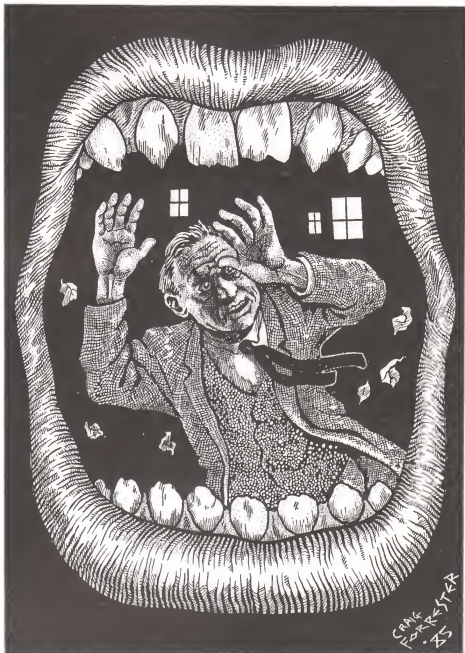
No flesh was borne upon that frame,
Its visage grinned at some weird game,
And from its rotting bones there came
The stench of Shadrezzar.

"Come ye fresh from some grey tomb,
Severed from your damp, dark gloom?"
I cried to this portent of doom.
Then spake the dancer wild and high,
In shuddersome and gleeful cry.
"Stranger, came I lately nigh
From the graves of Shadrezzar!

"And why the dead fly through this dell?
If thou wouldst know, then I wouldst tell
That ne'er in Hell's a race so fell
As dwells in Shadrezzar."

Dusk cut the sky with crimson weals,
And while I mulled his cryptic words
The dancer turned on fleshless heels.
For distant down that lonely wake,
I saw them coming with the night,
The things that make the dead to quake.
The Lords of Shadrezzar.

Turned I then, hard-spurred away,
And vowed a lifelong vow that day.
Ne'er again to tread the way
To Damnèd Shadrezzar.



"Telling himself to stop it only made him run faster."

Long Walk Home

By CHARLES L. GRANT

Illustration by CRAIG FORRESTER

MIDNIGHT was deserted after the party ended, but it was nothing Len hadn't seen a hundred times before - after other parties, other visits, other walks he had taken when the house grew too small and the silences too loud and the lights he turned on were too false for comfort.

It was familiar out here. It was his territory. It was the one time while awake when he could be alone and not be lonely.

Walking. Always walking.

As he did now, with hands in pockets and shoulders slightly raised, watching his shoes reach out to strike the pavement and slip away, break a stride to avoid the cracks, turn aside to crush a leaf and scatter it behind him. Nudging a pebble to one side. Kicking a stone into the grass. Turning to walk backward for a half-dozen paces and watch as the lights in the house he'd just left switched off, one by one, room by room, pulling the black after it like a blanket in winter. Turning back and smiling, shaking his head as the smile faded and wondering what he was going to do for the rest of the night.

What else, go home, he thought, and knew it was true.

But not for a while.

First there was the night, and the clearing of his head of all that champagne.

He paused and took a deep breath.

The air was cool, soft, and slightly damp on his skin, and when he lifted a hand he could feel a hint of ice, as if his fingers had brushed a dawn puddle before the sun killed the frozen dew - the birth of an autumn fog, and he loved that as much as he loved the autumn night. Late October, early November, when the earth began to die but did it with style, when the weather changed from sluggish to sharp, when his life marked yet another year without ending before he was ready.

He sniffed and turned his head from a sudden gust of wind, glanced up to see a streetlamp on the distant corner flicker and glare and send the shadows of parked cars leaping into the street. A hundred years, he thought with a one-sided grin; a hundred years from now that stupid thing still won't be working, like the porch light across the street, dull yellow and buzzing like the insects it was supposed to repel, like the man-hole cover at the intersection ahead that rattled and clanged whenever a tyre rode over, like the hedge that old Timothy couldn't train into cannon balls at the end of his front walk.

A hundred years wouldn't bring a single miracle to this street.

And he was glad.

Because if any of it ever worked, the neighbourhood would be different, it wouldn't be his home, and it wouldn't bring him the peace he usually found when he walked, slowly, in the dark.

And if he didn't walk, who would Mrs. Johanson try to marry to her spinster daughter with bribes of marble cake and tea and promises of eternal bliss; who would Mr. Smith try out his politics on, standing in his doorway and waving his hand and shouting that what the country needed now was another Harry Truman, another Teddy Rough Rider to straighten the young people out; and who would Gary and his brother get to fix their broken wagon because their salesman father was too tired to lift his feet from the couch?

A look up through the trees, to the stars being washed by a not-quite full moon. The winking lights of a passing airliner. The darker black of a night-bird skimming silently after its prey.

His smile returned, and his stride was long and brisk, and the air in his lungs was delightfully chilled.

He recalled then, for the first time in a long time, the last time he had been loved. She had not been stunning,

but quite attractive nevertheless, not forceful but independent, and he still didn't know why it had gone wrong, why she had left him, left town, and didn't call.

In college he had been known as Luft-waffe Sawyer, shot down more times than the Germans in the war. No one had been able to explain it then, and he'd decided that this was the way his cards had been dealt. He only wished, while he walked, that someone could tell him how to play.

Still, he thought as he shook the melancholy away, he had his evenings and his quiet, and he had his strolls, in the dark. Not great, but not bad, and nothing to make him think of suicide again.

A dog barked, once, and a grey dove darted from a tree with a soft cooing sound.

His head tilted slightly to the left, and he listened to the leaves, dry leaves husking gently in the black above his head, fallen leaves shifting sleepily in the shadows of the gutters; to the sound of his heels, softly sharp, a brief echo, the contented ghost of himself following quietly behind; to his trouser legs brushing and his jacket brushing his shirt and the voice of the wind as it paced him and passed him and pushed his hair into his eyes.

The best part of the night, he thought, when everything was his and he was welcomed by it all.

Listening with a smile to his deep, regular breathing.

To a footstep behind him.

He frowned in distaste and looked over his shoulder. No one walked the street this late. The children were long in bed, and the adults were snoring and snuggling and dreaming of the day when they wouldn't have to get up and get dressed and go to work. No one walked the street this late except him, because there was no one to hold and no one to waken and no position he held that required his presence.

Someone was across the street, hurrying in his direction, a shadow figure small and hunched, and he forced himself to look away so whoever it was wouldn't think he was staring.

He walked, and the figure paced him, and he thought of kids looking for hand-outs, of mean-spirited men whose malice found victims simply because the victim was alone.

As he was, tonight.

He wouldn't hurry. He would not run. He was not a victim and would not give the man the satisfaction of his fear. Instead, he let his arms swing and he let his legs take the pavement and he knew that his image was one of confidence, and strength.

And when he looked to his right, across the road, the sidewalk was empty.

Shadows only, and extensions of the black that settled over the houses.

He blinked, and listened, and allowed himself another smile.

It was the party, he decided; for some reason, everyone there had been with someone else. Pairs. Men and women. Not always together but pairs just the same. The fault of his host, but he hadn't complained. He had talked and he had laughed and he had toasted the host's birthday, and he had left the party alone because he'd wanted it that way.

Don't start, he told himself then; don't spoil it by feeling sorry for yourself, it isn't going to give you anything but heartburn. And he laughed, not sure he'd made a joke but laughing because it felt good, and it banished the odd feeling that someone was still back there.

Someone in the dark, watching him, and waiting.

His shoulders lowered, and he smoothed the jacket's lapels, and he swiveled his head to check the houses he passed, nodding when he knew them, pausing when a name failed to come immediately to mind.

A sigh as he spotted hopscotch squares chalked onto the sidewalk, imagining the girls chanting their rhymes as they hopped one foot, two, and snatched up the stone. He made a try of it himself, and chuckled when he nearly lost his balance and fell.

Feeling the air turn crisp, feeling the wind snap lightly at his cheeks.

Listening to the dry leaves in the dead black above him, listening to the dead leaves following him in the gutter.

His arms stretched over his head and he yawned, loudly, turned a pirouette and grinned. No one was there. The sidewalk was empty.

Shadows only.

And something waiting behind a car.

He almost tripped over his own feet in his amazement and attempts to face back the way he'd come. And when he stopped stumbling, he leaned forward and stared. Down there. Fifty feet away, to

a large black automobile parked at the curb, partially blocked by the canted bole of one of the block's high elms. Its chrome was only slightly lighter than its paint, the streetlamp too distant to do more than glow feebly; its glass was black and reflected nothing but black; and its engine ticked like the running of an old clock.

"Hey!" he called.

No answer, no sound at all.

He squinted, shaded his eyes, and saw nothing but the trunk of the next tree down the way, and wondered if there might be more to his melancholy than he thought.

What he required now, he decided, was his own home. Large and warm and filled with open spaces, it was nevertheless his, and his place to be safe.

He walked.

The wind blew.

The leaves.

The dark when the streetlamp flickered, and glared, and went out with a snap that sounded like breaking glass.

He stopped until his vision adjusted to the dim moonlight that turned all the porches to caverns and the tarmac to a black river and the windows to blind eyes that ignored him as he passed.

Then he moved again, a bit quicker, feeling the chill of the night settle onto his neck, onto his cheeks, and pull his lips apart into the twitch of a nervous grin because he knew he was scaring himself and could do nothing about it.

It was part of the night's allure, part of October's soul.

So with an embarrassed glance side to side he chanted under his breath the litany he'd devised when he'd first begun the walks: I am civilized, I am safe, I am in a place where people care; nothing is out here with me but the night, and I'm a big boy now, I can take care of myself.

Listening to the night, and to the sounds quickening behind him, now like hoofbeats on hard ground, now like the padding of a large cat stalking through a forest, now like the heels of a woman in a hurry, now like the soles of a man intent on murder.

"Stop it," he whispered when he saw his shadow darker on the pavement.

Feeling now the wind as it dropped, spider-like from the trees, crawling up his legs, slipping down his collar,

catching itself in his hair and blinding him until he brushed it angrily away.

"Knock it off."

Watching the leaves hasten toward him from the lawns, scabble toward him down the driveways, snag against tires and flutter like broken wings until they snapped loose and came at him, up over the curb.

There was nothing behind him.

There was nothing ahead.

He felt foolish, but finally he left the sidewalk and walked down the centre of the road, daring a car to lance him with its headlights, praying that a policeman would drive by and order him home, perhaps take him himself because he suspected Len was drunk.

Listening.

Watching.

A headache blossoming from behind his ears because the sounds, all those sounds were too soft to hear, the scratching and the hissing and the cracking and the rush.

The street was empty.

The pavement was deserted.

The moon was drifting behind the fringe of a cloud.

And he stopped at the intersection, a confluence of four endless tunnels whose walls shifted and whispered without a single touch of light, whose floors ran blacker than black had a right to be.

With hands curled into fists he stopped and inhaled slowly, deeply, and lifted his face toward the sky.

"Stop," he said in a perfectly calm voice.

He swallowed.

He opened his eyes and knew that nothing had changed. This was still his neighbourhood, still his street, still his place to do his walking and think. He was sorry for himself, nothing more, nothing less; he was apprehensive because his fiftieth birthday was approaching and the party tonight had only brought it home with more force than he'd thought.

This was his place.

This night, like all the others, was his night, his time, his balm for the wounds real or not the day had caused.

"Stop," he said, and looked around sheepishly, hoping no one had heard him.

His hands relaxed, his breathing slowed, and he shivered at the cooling of the sweat on his face.

All right, he thought; that's more like it, Len. That's more like it, so go

home and go to bed.

The first step was bold.

The second step had an echo.

The third step despite his orders began the first step of a slow trot that became a slow run when something behind him began running too.

And the branches dropped their leaves when the wind dove from the rooftops, and the twigs flew against his chin and bounced off his forehead, and the dust rose into a cloud that soon became a fog that filled the night with grey and touched his eyebrows with cold droplets that fell into his eyes and slithered down his spine and made his jacket smell like old damp wool and gave the tarmac an oily sheen that swirled as he ran over it and didn't muffle the footsteps that kept pace behind.

Hoofbeats.

Claws.

And telling himself to stop it only made him run faster.

When he passed under the streetlamp it snapped on and made him wince, made him swerve back toward the sidewalk where the leaves tumbled from the shadows and the shadows stretched from the dark and the dark hid the moon.

Running steadily, easily, knowing the house was just ahead and the mugger - it had to be a mugger, there was nothing else out here but him - would see it was fruitless and try some other place, some other victim.

Running, and slowing, the fog in thickening clouds lowering to hide his shoes, hide the lawns, hide the pavement and make him stumble because he could no

longer see where he was going. His toe kicked a raised portion of the concrete, and he toppled to one side with a startled cry, landed on his shoulder on a cold patch of grass, rolled over and was up again, jacket off one shoulder, hair dripping on his neck, using the panic to give him speed because this was his night and his place and as soon as he was inside he would prove it by turning on the lights and driving it back where it belonged.

The wind.

The leaves.

The dark above the fog.

The silence behind him as he turned into his walk and slowed, gulped for air, slowed again, and stopped.

"Jesus," he said, and blew out a breath. "Jesus, you're a jerk."

The wind, and the leaves, and he listened to them and knew them, as he had listened and had known them a hundred times before.

It was October, his favourite time of the year, and because he was no longer sure, he had nearly scared himself to death.

And scared himself again when he listened harder to the silence, the silence despite the wind, despite the leaves, despite his puffing; the silence that told him it wasn't his night at all, and never had been, never would be.

The silence as he turned when he heard the porch step creak.

The silence when he saw, in the dark, walking slowly, what the night was, after all.

Charles L. Grant's latest novel is *The Pet*, from Tor books in hardcovers. This makes around 30 novels he has published, under a variety of bylines and in a number of genres. Charlie is well-known as the editor of such anthologies as the *Shadows* series and is an accomplished and award-winning short story writer in his own right, with more than 100 tales to his credit, most recently in *Twilight Zone* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. *Penny Daye* was snatched by editor Karl Edward Wagner for *Year's Best Horror* (DAW Books), which makes it Grant's second British convention programme booklet story to be reprinted in that prestigious series. Charlie's quiet, dark tales of terror can be found in all the best anthologies of the past few years, including the landmarks of *New Terrors*, *Whispers* and *Dark Forces*, as well as in collections from Arkham House, Berkley and Doubleday (*Tales from the Nightside*, *A Glow of Candles* and *Nightmare Seasons*). *Long Walk Home* marks the author's second appearance in *Fantasy Tales* (the first being in issue 13) and we are very pleased to welcome back the stylish work of a master of macabre storytelling.



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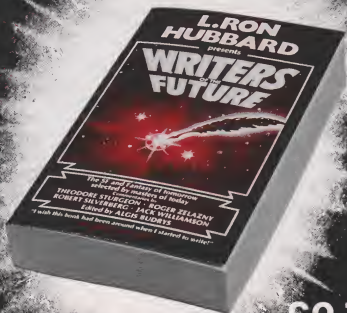
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"Her face was aglow with rapture as the arugo lapped at her hungrily."

Down By the Sea

By MALCOLM FURNASS

Illustration by MARK DUNN

IT WASN'T the same without George. Surrounded by the bustling holidaymakers, Kathleen felt even more alone than she had done these past few weeks at home. Today's excursion had not been such a good idea after all. She drew her cardigan closer about herself, sighed, and rearranged her hands on her lap.

She was sitting on a hard wooden bench, looking out over the mosaic of suntans and deck chairs on the beach below. The aroma of a busy hot dog stand mingled with the sea air to create a mildly intoxicating effect in the back of her throat. She watched as a lone gull launched itself from a tall, white-flecked rock offshore and made its

leisurely way inland. She lost track of it for a moment as it passed the sun, but it pleased her to think that she recognised it again as the one coming in to land nearby. It padded regally about on the concrete until the clack of approaching footsteps sent it flapping inelegantly away.

Kathleen looked up sharply. A young woman was passing her, obviously intent on some business of her own. Kathleen blinked, then gaped at the slender figure now moving away from her. At last she rose and found her voice.

"Lysa..."

The girl turned, a look of mild enquiry on her face. Her eyes fixed on Kathleen

and then narrowed visibly. Her lips pursed and puzzlement crossed her unlined features.

Kathleen started toward her, smiling brightly. "Lysa, this is incredible. After all these years..."

"Kathleen?" A voice slow and measured. "Kathleen Howard?"

Kathleen gave a brief laugh. "I recognised you immediately. You haven't changed a -"

She stopped, her face greying. It was true! Lysa still looked much the same as she had nearly thirty years ago. Her figure was fuller, but only in the right places; and she wore her clothing - a loose blouse, open at the neck, and close-fitting jeans - with a casualness quite beyond the scope of any teenager. But it was hard to imagine that she and Kathleen could once have been taken for sisters.

"The years have been good to you, too," Lysa was saying. "How's George keeping?"

"He...passed away last month."

"Oh, I am sorry. I had no idea. We never did keep in touch, did we?"

"No, we never did." Somehow it all seemed so trivial now. The petty rivalry that tore them apart. But George had made his choice. He was a man determined to get on in life, and he needed a dependable woman beside him. His job had entailed a lot of travelling, so it was not long before all their old ties had been broken. Kathleen had had no complaints, but in the years that followed she could not help wondering what the outcome would have been if Lysa's flighty nature had not been quite so evident back then.

"Here on holiday, are you?" asked Lysa.

"Just for the day. I'll be catching the seven o'clock train back."

"Then you'll be able to have dinner with us."

"Well, I..." Kathleen's eyes roamed, seeking inspiration.

"Don't be silly. We'd love to have you. We so rarely have guests, and Gus would be delighted to meet an old friend of mine."

"Well," (she *had* been wondering how to fill the hours remaining), "if you're sure." She didn't quite get round to asking who Gus was, though.

They walked; and their conversation blossomed of its own accord, feeding on itself and having its roots in days gone

by. The afternoon crowds eddied around them, virtually unnoticed. Electronic games buzzed and clattered in the background, almost drowning out the more traditional seafront clamour; but Kathleen was oblivious to it all. She was not entirely unobservant, however: She kept catching herself scrutinising her well-favoured companion, looking for any traces of lining around the eyes and mouth.

At length they turned into a side street where a black Bentley loomed at the kerbside. A man in the driver's seat glowered over his newspaper as they approached. Kathleen gave a start when she realised that the car was waiting for them.

Lysa held open the nearside back door. "Hop inside. It's not far."

Kathleen felt suddenly apprehensive. What was she letting herself in for? A string of unanswered questions flashed through her mind as she stooped into the car, but how could she give voice to them without seeming overly querulous in the eyes of her girlhood friend? She studiously avoided looking at the driver as she slid across the seat, and was thankful that Lysa followed immediately behind her.

"You're late," growled the driver.

"What's it to you?" asked Lysa haughtily. "Anyway," she continued, more pleasantly, "I met an old friend. She'll be staying for dinner."

The driver turned away without looking at Kathleen. "If you say so." The car started up. "Your word goes these days, as far as the skipper's concerned. You've got him right where you want him."

He was a stocky man of around sixtyish, with hard, craggy skin that must have been difficult to shave. He was wearing a dark green jacket with peaked cap to match. Short grey bristles sparsely covered the ruddy flesh behind his bulbous ears. His hands, on the wheel, were thick and stubby, tempered almost to granite hardness.

Lysa snuggled back into the upholstery. "Meyers doesn't approve of women," she told Kathleen with mock solemnity.

Meyers kept his eyes on the flow of traffic ahead, waiting for an opening. "Maybe the skipper would not be so tolerant, either, if someone were to open his eyes about you - tell him why you really spend so much time in town, for instance ..."

"And who's going to do that?" asked Lysa, sweetly. "You're far too loyal to want to distress him so pointlessly."

Kathleen felt decidedly uncomfortable as the car hummed through town. Outside, the crowds were thinning. Inside, the silence grew thick - unbreakable, it seemed to her, though she could not muster the means to verify it. Lysa slumped back carelessly, seemingly lulled by the vehicle's motion, reminding Kathleen of a pampered she-cat. Kathleen, perturbed by her friend's posture, made sure that she held her own back straight and both feet planted on the floor.

Leaving town, they soon came to a rambling Tudor-style house overlooking the sea. It presented a stark black-and-white contrast against sky and cloistering evergreens. They scrunched to a halt on the gravel driveway outside the front door and soon Meyers was ushering them inside, albeit grudgingly.

"Don't let Gus put you off," advised Lysa. "He's sweet once you get to know him."

Kathleen felt almost inclined to duck as she entered. The ceiling was inhosptably low, with heavy wooden beams running across at intervals. The place was cluttered to the point of untidiness with more exotic bric-a-brac than the eye could readily take in.

An elderly man in a wheelchair appeared from around a corner. The smart cut of his suit could not disguise his obvious frailness or conceal the narrowness of his shoulders. He was hunched forward, his lean neck jutting his long nose and small, sharp eyes towards them. Before he could say anything, Lysa bent down and kissed him on the cheek. His eyes remained fixed on Kathleen.

"She's an old friend of mine, Gus," explained Lysa. "I knew you wouldn't mind if I asked her round for a meal. She has to catch the seven o'clock train home."

He stared at Kathleen for one terrible moment longer, then looked up into Lysa's face and patted her hand on his shoulder. "Seven o'clock, you say? Then we'll eat a little earlier tonight," he said in a soft, quavering voice. "Is that all right with you, Meyers?"

"Of course," the man said stiffly, turning away and vanishing into the bowels of the old house.

The others adjourned to a cramped drawing room which could easily have passed for an excessively opulent cabin in

some old-time sailing vessel. Above a wall-hugging settee at the far side of the room, a small-paned window was flung wide open to the sea and sky; but it was far too small to provide either adequate ventilation or illumination. The resultant murkiness was well-suited to this room, though. It blended perfectly with the antique mahogany furniture, the exquisite gold ornaments, the shelves of leather-bound volumes, the lush oriental tapestries, the hand-carved wooden statuettes, the ranks of polished brass reliefs adorning the overhead beams. And it was just the kind of setting one would have expected to find the old man nestled in.

"These are my treasures," he explained, once the necessary introductions had been dispensed with. "The accumulation of a lifetime of roving. It's an indication of how possessive a man gets in his final years."

Lysa settled beside him on the settee by the window. "Now don't be thinking yourself unique, Gus. We'd all like to cling to pieces of our past. It's just that you have means to do so physically: Most of us have to rely on memory. Why, you should have heard Kath and me back in town..."

The afternoon passed quickly after that. Kathleen's feeling of unease soon dissipated as her reminiscences pooled with Lysa's. Gus seemed content just to listen. He was not nearly the cantankerous old man he had first appeared to be. But there was something undefinably sad about him.

He smiled pleasantly enough in all the right places, but only, it seemed to Kathleen, on the surface. The fondness he had for Lysa was real enough, though. And from the looks they exchanged, Kathleen knew the feeling was reciprocal. But although she stayed alert for any further hints, their occasional gestures and touchings could not be interpreted as anything more than a surrogate father/daughter relationship.

Kathleen was still dwelling on this when Meyers came in to announce that dinner would soon be served. Gus chased the girls upstairs to freshen up, and once they were alone Kathleen could not help prying a little deeper. "How long have you known Gus?" she asked, innocuously enough.

"Nearly ten years now."

Kathleen's eyes widened.

"And, no, it's not what you're thinking," Lysa retaliated. "Sure, I'll be well provided for, but he really isn't ~~that~~ wealthy. Before I met him I was a mess, literally. Gus changed my whole life, gave me something worth living for again..."

Kathleen tried to keep her face bland. That did not sound like Lysa - not the image of her that Kathleen had decided upon, anyway.

A little later, the seaside grime rinsed away and feeling the better for it, Kathleen was making her way downstairs when a door opened and Lysa joined her. She was wearing a glossy black form-hugging evening dress with a V-neck almost to her navel, and a hem-to-thigh side-slit. Her hair was piled up to highlight the ruby earrings, while a sprinkling of smaller stones dangled tastefully around her neck and one wrist. Kathleen found it hard to tear her eyes away.

Though ashamed - and even a little frightened - of the stirring she felt deep within her, she had to admit that Lysa was devastating. The earlier youthful, breezy look had been transformed into something more dignified, more mature. Even her posture had changed subtly, somehow more regal, in keeping with her new look. Her face seemed fuller; quieter and more reserved, but with a stronger imprint of character.

Clothes do maketh the woman.

Kathleen had probably never felt so conscious of her own appearance as she did at that moment. She would have been even more intimidated by all the elegance at the dining table, had her host not made a point of putting her at ease. "We always dress for dinner," he told her. "It's one of the little luxuries we allow ourselves. Please forgive an old man his fancies."

Just then Meyers arrived, pushing a delicate silver trolley.

"You'll enjoy this, my dear," continued the host. "Meyers is an excellent cook. One of the many skills he acquired in our travels."

Kathleen had guessed that Meyers was more than just a manservant. "You've been together a long time?"

"I took him on as a cabin boy, still wet behind the ears." The thought seemed to amuse Gus, but Meyers was unmoved.

"They're inseparable," said Lysa. "Two of a kind. Their adventures together

would fill a library."

"But it all ends here," the old man said pensively, "in a cottage by the sea. The lure of the ocean, where everything began and where everything returns."

The meal was...unusual. Plain, simple fare with an exotic hint of far away. In response to Kathleen's enquiry, Gus said that it was something Meyers had "picked up around the islands of Samora."

Lysa gave a start. "Oh!"

"Yes, where we once interrupted a native ceremony in honour of Tumudurere, their vengeful sea god." He smiled, and for once it seemed genuine. "Very superstitious, those Polynesians."

"I believe," Lysa said flatly, "that Meyers is trying to make a rather pointed comment."

Meyers said nothing.

"If you won't say it, I will. It's me, isn't it? You resent my presence. To you I'll always be an intruder here."

Meyers looked at her. "The skipper and I managed well enough before you came along."

"Managed" is just about the right word, too. How much longer do you suppose it could have gone on? Gus needed me then, just as I have come to need him."

"Then you choose a strange way of showing it...tramping about like some cheap -"

"Enough," said Gus, his aged voice still conveying a note of authority. "Meyers, we are alike, you and I, but Lysa is of a different world, a different era." He looked at her for all the world like an indulgent father. "So long as she is here where I need her, that is all I ask. Now, let's hear no more of it. Remember our guest."

Kathleen had been trying to look interested in the scraps on her plate. "Well, actually, I think it's about time I was leaving."

"Oh, there's no need to hurry. Meyers can have you back in town in plenty of time." Gus tried to smooth things over, but the spell had been broken. The lightness of the afternoon was gone and shadows were gathering in the corners of the room.

After-dinner conversation was strained, to say the least. Lysa was very withdrawn, speaking only when spoken to, and then only in the barest of sentences. Meyers kept putting in a silent appearance to ensure that everything was put ship-shape after the meal. Kathleen watched

his comings and goings with interest - at least it took her eyes off the stately old clock that pulsed so infuriatingly in its darkening alcove. She tried to seem interested in her host's interminable tales of his seafaring days. No wonder Lysa is looking so melancholy, she thought, if this is what she has to put up with every night.

At last Kathleen announced regrettably that she really must be going now. Gus apologised for his long-windedness, but she replied that it had all been fascinating. With the prospect of leaving just ahead of her, she found it very easy to be gracious.

Lysa did not see her to the car. Even as they kissed goodbye, she had seemed preoccupied. Her face was drawn, particularly at the eyes and mouth, and her chin sagged noticeably. Kathleen's personal relief was aggravated by concern for her friend. But she knew it was really none of her business. A last look back, as she was leaving the room, showed Lysa standing by the open window, staring out to sea. Her eyes were glazed, unfocussed; and in the fading light one would swear she looked almost haggard. She must have been slumping a little, too, for her gown no longer fitted as well as it should. It was this disconcerting image that Kathleen carried back to town with her.

Meyers dropped her off at the station without a word. Kathleen dawdled at the entrance until the car was no longer distinguishable in the two-way procession snaking along the neon avenue. Thank goodness it was over at last. She permitted herself a little smile before heading in to the ticket barrier.

"Sorry, lady, your train left half an hour ago," she was told.

Kathleen automatically glanced at her wristwatch even though there was a station clock hanging close to the man's head. "But I'm sure the man said seven o'clock."

"That was last year's schedule. There won't be another train with your connections until tomorrow morning, I'm afraid."

Kathleen was more annoyed with herself than the porter who had given her the misleading information. After all, he had seemed frightfully busy when she had enquired, and those rows of closely-printed figures would have been enough to confuse anyone. If only she had asked

someone at this end, or even brought along her reading glasses, she could have made sure. But there was no point apportioning the blame now. The fact remained that she was stranded; and in the middle of the holiday season there would be no chance of getting accommodation at such short notice.

She fabricated a mental list of the options open to her and rejected them one by one. She had known all along that there was really only one thing she could do.

She took a taxi to Gus's place and got out at the roadside. She walked up the tree-lined driveway to give herself time to consider the best way of explaining her plight. It was already quite dark, but her way was lit patchily by the full moon shining through the trees.

She heard sounds on the gravel ahead, and rounded a bend just in time to see three figures leaving the driveway for a footpath leading away from the house. She did not call to them: She felt it best not to attract their attention just yet. Cautiously, she approached the path, which she discovered curved down a short incline to the beach. Meyers was pushing Gus's wheelchair over the sand and Lysa was walking beside them. She was wearing a knee-length bathrobe and sandals.

Intensely curious, Kathleen decided to stay out of sight until she learned just what they were up to. She scurried down to the path's first curve, where a conveniently placed bush afforded her a discreet view of the entire moonlit cove.

The three protagonists had stopped now, and Meyers turned the wheelchair to face the sea. Without a word, Lysa doffed her robe, slipped out of her sandals and strode naked into the sea. Even from Kathleen's distance the marked difference in Lysa's appearance was obvious. She stepped eagerly enough, but without her earlier sprightliness. Her body sagged, rumpling her flesh in so many places that they could not be mistaken for moonshadows.

She stopped when the water reached her waist, threw back her head and raised her arms to the sky. Then, slowly, she continued the motion, crossing them and bringing her palms down over her body as if to smooth out the skin. She caressed herself above and below the water-line, writhing a little more with every stroke.

Kathleen was repulsed by the display and wondered what perverse enjoyment the

two men could get out of it. She looked toward the beach. Gus was there, hunched forward, gazing avidly out to sea.

He was alone.

A sudden panicky impulse made her turn around. Meyers was coming up the path, his stern features set on her. She turned to run, but with alarming speed Meyers was upon her with a grip like iron. She yelped her protests and pummelled the hand that held her wrist, but to no avail. Grimly silent, he dragged her down to the beach.

Gus did not even notice their approach. He was totally enraptured by Lysa's show of primitive abandon. She had worked herself to a frenzy, her body gyrating with a suppleness Kathleen would never have thought possible. Suddenly there was a disturbance in the water near her. A small wave, a ripple, something. It moved forward and closed around her. Gus gave an exclamation of either anticipation or triumph.

It was only then that he noticed Kathleen. If he was surprised he concealed it well. "It begins. A ritual as old as humanity."

Kathleen squirmed in Meyers' grip. "Let me go! I don't know how you've got Lysa to go along with your sick fantasies, but I want no part of it!"

Something very definite was happening out in the water. It was starting to get rough. Something was agitating the tidal rhythm and little white-capped peaks were forming. But only in a small area around Lysa.

"It is too late," the old man was saying. "You have profaned the sacred rite, and Tumudurere does not easily forgive his transgressors."

There was something about his voice that Kathleen did not like. She struggled with renewed effort until Meyers had to use both hands to restrain her. Blood pulsed at her temples as she tried to control her thoughts. What was going on? They were mad; they had to be. They were both insane, psychotic. But why was the water acting the way it did?

All around Lysa it was churning like a kettle on the boil, lapping against her, caressing her. Plumes of spray lashed her body. Her head rolled in ecstasy as she stood braced, inviting more.

Gus was still speaking, from somewhere far away: "Tumudurere, lord of Hiyoyoa, the realm beneath the sea where the souls

of the dead toil endlessly."

Kathleen had stopped her struggling. The scene before her demanded all her attention. With great difficulty she dragged her eyes away and stared wildly at the shrivelled old man who seemed so blasé about it all. Was she the one who was insane?

"I, too, am guilty of transgression," he told her in a flat, emotionless voice that contained lifetimes of regret. "I was only trying to save a native girl - a mere child - from some barbaric ritual... To atone for my sin I have to find fresh offerings to Tumudurere ever since."

Meyers had released Kathleen by now, but she seemed unaware of the fact. A wind was gusting shoreward, whipping her hair about her cheeks, rustling the quilt blanket around Gus's legs. As if in a nightmare, she could not stop herself being carried along.

"Meyers and I travelled around a lot in those days. There were always people who wouldn't be missed. Men, women, children: the *arugo* aren't choosy. Just as the living prey on the dead to survive, the *arugo* - the souls of the dead - take what they want from the living." The wind howled on, but his voice would not be stilled. "Maybe a braver man would not have done as I did...but, having seen Hell, I'm in no hurry to get there..."

The wavelets clamoured around Lysa, heaving up to lash her glistening form. Some, taller than a man, broke over her as if to drag her down; but still she stood, her head tossed back, laughing as the water cascaded over her sleek, smooth skin.

Somewhere close to Kathleen, Gus was shouting to make himself heard. "Your friend has proved a unique case. She thrives on the *arugo*'s caresses. She takes from them as they take from her. The ultimate symbiosis..."

Either the old man had stopped talking or the wind had grown too strong; but Kathleen no longer needed to hear him. After all, she had eyes.

Lysa was turning. She faced the shore, her eyes unseeing. Her entire body was quivering and her face was aglow with rapture as the *arugo* lapped at her hungrily. Kathleen could see them now. Like moonlight on the waves, pale and flesh-like: Faces. They squabbled with each other, fought for possession, tumbled

and fell, rose again. One face, as crazed as the rest, caught her attention. By the third time it had bobbed into view, she could restrain herself no longer. Her voice shrilled above the raging wind as she repeated George's name over and over ...

Just before she passed out, she seemed to sense a pale-skinned, flaxen-haired figure with Mongol characteristics looming over the horizon. Not unnaturally, it was finding the whole thing most amusing.

SHE awoke in a soft bed with sunlight peeping from behind the curtains nearby. There were others in the room with her: She knew them from somewhere. Two of them stood up, then all three were

moving toward her.

A voice sounded, not meant for her: "It seems you're not quite so unique after all, my dear."

She tried to speak, but her throat and mouth were dry with the taste of salt. The bed was damp, sticky, and her hair clung tickly to her skin. She felt grimy all over, outside and in. Salt - she knew it was salt - clogged her pores, wedged her nails, pervaded her entire being...

Lysa's face hovered above her - young, smiling, framed by a mass of flossy hair. "Relax," she said. "Take it easy. That's quite an experience you've had; but you're already looking better for it."

Malcolm Furnass is a part-time writer whose work has appeared in a number of small press magazines. He has a poem and story upcoming in *The Australian Horror & Fantasy Magazine*, but most of his work is in the comics field, writing scripts for D.C. Thomson's space-adventure *Starblazer* series. *Down By the Sea* is something of a departure from that!





"One day there came to the golden beaches of Mare Serenis a young witch."

The Exile of Earthendale

By ADRIAN COLE

Illustration by JIM PITTS

THROUGH the often misty skies of the astral realms flew the familiar, for once on no specific purpose for his reluctant master. That frightful hand that the dark man carried would wriggle through Elfloq's dreams for always, and he had no wish to be near it again immediately. However, his ears and eyes were constantly alert for any word or revelation that could strengthen the tenuous bond between him and the Voidal. Elfloq was also wary because secretly he feared the wrath of the Dark Gods whose desires did not always coincide with his own. He had grinned at past intimations that they would exact a retribution from his squamous hide, but privately he had many qualms. For the moment, though, ambition overrode them all.

As he flew through a particularly murky patch of the astral, Elfloq heard a nearby flutter of wings and then a piping hail. "Elfloq? Is that you I spy?"

Elfloq's own wings thrummed as he steadied himself. From out of the surrounding murk materialized another familiar. This was Troldo, a waggish youngster who was at least as fond as gossip as was Elfloq. They exchanged greetings and agreed cheerfully to fly on together for a while, speaking of various intrigues and plots in which they had lately partaken.

Shortly before Troldo was due to veer away on his master's work, they heard a doleful throbbing sound emanating from the near distance like the boom of a great dying heart: Its source was invisible, but it broke over them like the billows of some melancholy sea, full of immense sadness and despair.

Elfloq reeled, astounded by the depth of the anguish. "I have never heard such sorrow. Who suffers out there in the emptiness?"

Troldo snorted derisively. "Ah, pay no heed! 'Tis only the Old Man down on Earthendale. They say he is crazed; he must be so to bemoan a sojourn there. Fool! 'Tis a

bright, healthy world, full of harmless beings. Why, even the witches there would rather kiss than curse!" He winked lecherously.

"Does no one listen to the Old Man?"

"Not any more. He is tiresome and his moaning has become an unwitting beacon, warning astral travellers away, not to him as he wishes. Well, I must away myself. Duty calls. Until we meet again, Elfloq."

Elfloq, distracted, muttered a goodbye. He felt drawn to the mournful call of the Old Man, whose sorrow must be fathomless if he could voice it up from his world into the very astral realms. Near feverish with curiosity, Elfloq flew closer to the source of the pulsing sorrow. He soon detected the proximity of the world of Earthendale, and with no more than a brief inner debate, popped out into a clear blue sky and a sunny, invigorating climate.

Far below him the contours of Earthendale stood out like an embossed map, the hills and dips rich in greenery, voluptuous and alluring. Elfloq sensed the nearness of the Old Man of sorrow and swooped downwards. Presently he found himself confronted by a towering wall of stone, a huge, living crag that rose up uniquely from the surrounding dales. It was set here like the intrusive castle of a god, and from it one must be able to see half the world. It was upon the top of this gigantic outcrop that the astral voice of the old man had its source.

Elfloq flew over the mossy rim, marvelling at the small meres and waterfalls and sprawling floral groves that adorned the crest of the crag. A miniature paradise, he thought, and more salubrious by far than many grim divine retreats he had seen. He found the Old Man by a glittering pool, sat upon a rock, head in his hands as if sobbing with his distress. Yet he was silent, though Elfloq knew his voice reached out still into the astral.

Gently, the familiar alighted on the

springy turf beyond the pool, putting the placid water between himself and the Old Man. Scintillant butterflies fluttered away from the movement. The Old Man looked up at once. There were no tears in his eyes, but unspeakable pains resided there. He seemed amazed by Elfloq's presence and for a moment struggled to find words to express his confused emotions.

"I heard your distress," said Elfloq. "It seemed only courteous that I should visit you."

This only served to promote the Old Man's dumbness, as though he had received an even greater shock. His silence had started to become a source of minor embarrassment to Elfloq and the familiar began to fidget.

"Have you come to laugh at me, as did all the others? I had thought they had ceased coming. It has been so long," said the Old Man at last, his words were laboured, almost too much of an effort.

"Laugh? Nay. Curiosity brought me, sir, of the idle kind. You seem to be suffering greatly. I interpreted your sorrow as an appeal, a plea -"

"Indeed!" cried the Old Man. Elfloq found himself gazing into twin prisms of hope that sparkled almost as intensely as the sorrow. "A plea it was, and always is. Is it foolish of me to suppose that you have come with the intention of aiding me? I had thought myself denied pity."

Elfloq sniffed nonchalantly and began examining certain of the exotic blooms around him. He must discover what advantages he could gain here before any commitments. "I have a master, of course, whose work is my only calling. You appreciate that I cannot step outside the bounds of my duty to him."

The Old Man's hope began to fade like winter sunlight at dusk. "Yes," he sighed. "As I feared. As you say, it is curiosity has brought you, as with others. The best I can hope for is ridicule. Best be on your way, familiar! You are too painful a reminder that other worlds beside this one exist."

"Oh, I have a little time to spare at the present," replied Elfloq. "And it may be that I can be of some small service - my master, I feel sure, would be glad to spare me for such, provided, that is, it would benefit him in some small way." Or myself, thought Elfloq, though thought it imprudent to say so. "If you understand me?"

The Old Man sighed, his body shudder-

ing. "A small service? If you could aid me, familiar, I would certainly attempt to aid your master."

Elfloq tried not to appear too eager. "How? Are you a god?"

The Old Man shook his head. "No! Nor have I ever sought godhead. I have a few simple powers, though like me, they are dying. I have so little time left. You can have all that is mine, all my waning power, all my small secrets. I gladly promise you that. But is it enough to win your help?"

"If the task set me is not too vast or inconvenient, then we may well be able to do business. Tell me more about yourself and your plight here. Is this not the beautiful world it seems?"

The Old Man nodded. "Oh, it is. But... incomplete." His skin, Elfloq noticed, was dry and cracked, parched as a desert, his brow scored with channels and lines as if scorched and worn by terrible heat - did he not bathe in the soft pools here? There was grime and loam encrusted in his pores. Why did he torture himself with such uncleanliness?

"My name is Mermerides. This is not my native world, although it is beautiful and fair, and more so than a thousand other worlds. I am from the oceans of whispering Mare Serenis. How far away that is, I cannot say. Many universes, many dimensions - the width of the entire omniverse, perhaps.

"How did I come here? Willingly. It was so long ago that it seems I must have lived out a hundred lifetimes here. As a young man I lived in the warm waters of Mare Serenis, for I am a spright (though to you I must seem more like a withered tree spirit). Hot-blooded I was, too, for the sprites are not the cold fish others sometimes think us. I loved and honoured my mistress, the boundless ocean, and she gave herself freely to me and my fellows. Our desires lacked nothing. Our lives were full, joyous.

"One day there came to the golden beaches of Mare Serenis a young witch from this world, Earthendale. She was gathering shells and conches and bright pebbles for her simple spells at home, for they are compulsive hoarders, you know. They love beautiful things. At once she wove a spell over me - oh, it was no intentional thing! She had no inkling that her strange alien beauty captivated me - not until I stepped sleekly from the sea and walked with her. Ah, but how blissful

that day was! I knew instinctively that the magic worked in her also. We spoke nothing of it, except with eyes, with embarrassed movements of our hands, but love had netted us.

"Later, when we had learned more of each other and at last spoken our mutual love, I walked with her to the edge of the sea, asking her to let the waters soothe her feet. But the salty spray spat in anger and jealousy! Mare Serenis was not to be placated. I was a sprite, she said, and I belonged to the sea. The witch was of the earth, alien, to be tolerated and not to be worshipped. My own anger was huge! Such is the impetuosity of young love that I turned my back on my mother sea. I told my beautiful witch, Lissild, that I would return with her to her world. She was torn by her love for me and her fear of my rash decision, but in the end our love rejected all cautions, as love often will. I see now that it was foolish of me, but I went with her - yet I would not change that. I would not alter my past, nor a moment of her nearness.

"Mare Serenis whispered to me as I walked away across her wide sands. 'Go!' she cried tempestuously. 'No good will come of your bond. As you spurn me, so do I you. Never return! You will die alone, far away.' I was young, ablaze with love, which laughs at fear. I must have thought that I would live with my Lissild forever.

"She worked the magic that brought us both through the astral realms to this world. At first I was overawed by the undulating dunes, the rounded hills and the verdant forests. They made me giddy and I could not dwell in such confusion. Lissild found this high place, where I can yet watch the clouds chasing each other like combers and study the blue depths of the sky, so reminiscent of the sea. We were so happy. In time we had our first child, then more. They were sturdy, content, but such isolation became too restricting to them and they begged us to let them descend the crags and go out into the world to seek their separate destinies. Painful departures they were, for the children were great strength to me, but they went, ablush with hope. Their earth called, their god.

"There were seven, and all have long since gone, even our raven-haired daughters. High places were not for them and they were happier climbing down to be

one with the bosom of the earth. Their mother and I never stayed them. Later we wept. It may have been those sad departures that began my witch-wife's decline. Earthendale's children do not live long, you see (though they believe it is for ever as they go back into the earth and are reborn). Lissild died and I wrapped her small form in thick leaves tied with vines and watched her plummet over the crag to a long-overdue reunion with the earth so far below. Does that sound a cruel way to part? No, I should have released her sooner. She should have gone with the children.

"I expected to live but a short time after she had gone from me, but to my horror have lived on. It has been the promised curse of Mare Serenis. Her water children live short, youthful lives (as do the earth children) but my life has dragged on, reluctant to abandon me. I thought of leaping from the crags, but cannot face such an end. I have no claims on the earth god. The water? No, it is not the sea. The sea birthed me and must be my grave. I will not live forever - I am indeed no god - but am to die very soon.

"Before I die, there is one burning dream I must fulfil. I must go back to Mare Serenis. I must stand one last time upon her whispering shores. I must go down to the laughing waters and feel their silken touch, their goodness, and pray to the sea mother to be remembered, for I am not deserving of forgiveness."

The Old Man had been staring at the clouds. His eyes turned once more upon Elfloq. "No one has offered me hope of such a return. Will you? I have no magic, no spells to take me across the astral."

Elfloq cleared his throat, in which some inexplicable lump has wedged. "I may be able to work a few magics, I think. I once had a master who was a sorcerer. Quite notorious he was. You may have heard of him -"

"Say what you require of me," said the Old Man breathlessly, leaning forward, desperate to be able to give something useful to the familiar.

"Oh, a little knowledge will suffice," Elfloq sniffed. "Nothing extravagant. You must think me rude to ask anything of you. Well, I'd help you for a smile, but my master -"

"Of course. What knowledge?"

Elfloq had hopped round the pool and stood close to the Old Man. "There are certain gods at work in the omniverse.

In truth there are many, but these are malicious and particularly terrible. Their purposes are shrouded in secrecy, often in pain, always in fear - all seem wary of them, even other gods. What can you tell me of them? They are known simply as the Dark Gods."

Mermerides gave this some thought, nodding. Elfloq had expected an answer garbed in horror, but there was none as Mermerides spoke. "I know a little of them. Glad I am that it was only Mare Serenis that I offended and not the Dark Gods, for they would doubtless have punished me far more mercilessly than the sea mother."

"They are evil?"

Mermerides shook his head. "Oh, not truly so. Cruel, perhaps, but not evil. They war on evil and often use what would seem to be evil methods. But they are just. Fire against fire, fury against fury."

"Their purpose?"

"They are the Punishers. The gods of justice. I know very little, but they serve some supreme deity I think."

"They do? Not evil," breathed Elfloq.

"The darkness that hides them is the darkness of mystery, enigma. Gods of retribution. Then they would not destroy or chastise or punish for a mere whim or for spite, but for valid reasons? They act purely by design?"

"Yes, in justice."

Elfloq clapped his tiny hands. "I am satisfied. It is enough. A little knowledge. I shall treasure it, Old Man. Uh... that is, my master will be pleased, and in his pleasure lies my own." He was happy, for it painted the Dark Gods in a less awesome aspect and suggested that they would have little time to seek out a minor recalcitrant such as himself.

Mermerides stood up, tears welling in his eyes. He shook, his body tired, enfeebled by the colossal weight of years. "Then...you will take me from here?"

"If I can. It is not common for a man to journey through the astral realms. Mages, necromancers, sorcerers - they do so at will, though not with ease. It will be difficult for you."

"I have nothing to live for here. If I die here, the earth will not have me. Work your spells."

Elfloq nodded. He possessed a remarkable memory and from it was able to tug innumerable cantrips, spells, workings, as well as information about the omniverse that

would have filled whole libraries. He sifted this and took from his trove a working that might help Mermerides across the astral. Then he began to murmur and make passes (habit forced him to dramatize the entire procedure as it gave him a heightened sense of self-importance).

Mermerides felt a roaring sensation in his veins; the sky went very black and rushed down like the fall of a mountain range to squash him. Winds tore at him but then thrust him forward like a tide. Oblivion claimed him for a while.

Elfloq guided the apparently lifeless Old Man across the astral at great speed until satisfied that he was near the world of Mare Serenis. The familiar worked more sorcery to bring them through into light...

...They were standing between two tall dunes, the breeze lifting a sheet of sand from the wide beach before them. Mermerides stirred and swayed on his feet. Elfloq, half his height, steadied him, squinting into the distance for the sea. "Is this your world?"

Mermerides gazed at the lapping waters so far away. Their greens and blues fused and rolled as waves raced energetically shoreward, expending themselves happily in surf that bubbled up the beach in glee. The Old Man gasped, his hand slapping his chest. He drew in the air as if taking a powerful anodyne. "Mare Serenis!" he whispered, his voice thick with emotion. It was as if all his early memories raced up the beach with those sparkling waters, coming to meet him with mirth. But they teased, receding, leaving the sands damp and gleaming, empty.

Suddenly Mermerides collapsed, face grey, eyes misting. He could barely speak. Elfloq quickly knelt beside him. "What is it, Old Man?"

"Heart...about to beat...its last. No matter. I have seen."

"The water," muttered Elfloq, staring in angry despair at the remote tide line. "I will take you to it."

"I am too much for you -"

"Nonsense!" Gamely Elfloq put his tiny arms about the back and neck of the Old Man and managed to raise him to a sitting position. His worn shift parted and fell, leaving the husk of body naked, corpse-like. Elfloq began the immense task of dragging him through the resisting dried sand and onto the firmer sand of the upper beach. But the familiar knew that his task was impossible. The sea was so

far off. Had it receded? He could never manage so great a weight as Mermerides, however frail, though a normal man would have picked him up like a doll. Yet Elfloq would try.

The Old Man wheezed a faint, final thanks and Elfloq sensed his life trickling away. Defeated, impotent, Elfloq cursed as he had to lower the dying man to the sand. There were unique tears in his own eyes. He looked at the sea and shook a tiny fist. "A pox on you for this! May all your children leave you!"

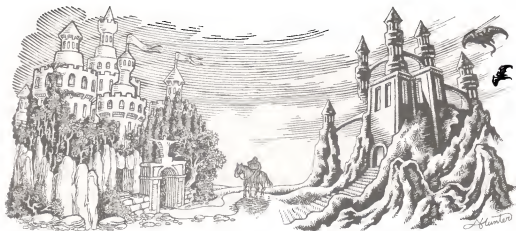
As he spluttered his anger, he saw another wave about to break, but one that was fuller and taller than the others. It began to race unnaturally up the beach, churning the sand, flinging high white spume of anger. Afraid now that he had infuriated the sea mother, Elfloq took to his heels and scampered off for the

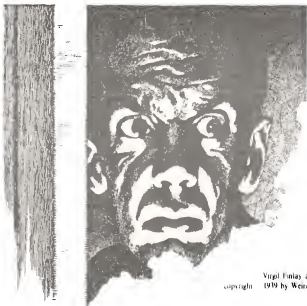
dunes. Half way there he turned, smitten with horror and guilt, for the body of the Old Man was stretched helplessly upon the open sands like a corpse upon a bare catafalque. The wave boiled over him in a cascade of noisy surf.

"Mermerides!" cried Elfloq. "I did not mean to desert you..."

The wave had broken; no more than a few drops splashed Elfloq's feet. The familiar felt the air vibrate with a sudden stab of great joy. He saw the waters recede and in their embrace was the body of their prodigal child. Mermerides was floating out upon the now-calm waters. The shout of the surf was gone. Elfloq could not see the Old Man's face from here, for it gazed down into the deeps, but Elfloq knew somehow that it smiled its first smile for countless centuries.

Adrian Cole has been re-establishing himself in the fantasy writing arena after a couple of years break. His continuing series of 'Voldal' stories were to be published by Starblaze in a three-volume set. This has unfortunately now fallen through, though the project is still up and running. Various 'Voldal' yarns have been published over the years (including *First Make Them Mad in Fantasy Tales 4* - the tale which first introduced Elfloq), and Adrian tells us that reprints crop up from time to time in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Belgium. *Exile of Earthendale* was originally published in Dutch in *Hexa 6* in 1981. More recent are a couple of successful juvenile fantasy novels, *Moortones* and *The Sleep of Giants* (from Spindlegood Press, Devon, in 1982/83). In Spring this year expect *A Place Among the Fallen* in hardcover from Allen & Unwin, with a mass-market paperback sometime next year. In America, Arbor House has bought hardback rights. Adrian is just putting the finishing touches to *Throne of Fools*, a sequel to *Place*, both of which are epic Adult Fantasy.





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"He heard no more until the creature found its food and began to devour it."

After Nightfall

By DAVID RILEY

Illustration by ALLEN KOSZOWSKI

ELLIOT Wilderman never struck anyone as a person possessing that necessary instability of character which makes men in sudden fits of despair commit suicide. Even his landlady, Mrs Jowitt, never had even the vaguest suspicions that he would ever do anything like that. Why should she? Indeed, Wilderman was certainly not poor, he was in good health, and was amiable and well-liked in the old-fashioned village of Heron. And, in such an isolated hamlet as this, it took a singularly easy-going and pleasant type of person to be able to get on with its definitely backward, and in many cases decadent, population.

Civilisation had barely made an imp-

ression here for the past two hundred years. Elsewhere, such houses as were common here, and lived in by those not fully sunken into depraved bestiality, were thought of as slums: Ancient edifices supporting overhangs, gables, high-peaked roofs, bizarrely-raised pavements three feet above the streets, and tottering chimneys that towered like warped fingers into the eternally bleak sky.

Despite the repellant aspects of the village, Wilderman had been enthusiastic enough when he arrived early in September. Taking a previously reserved room on the third floor of the solitary inn, he soon settled down and became a familiar

sight wandering about the wind-ravaged hills, which emerged from the woods in barren immensities of bracken and hardy grass; or visiting various people, asking them in his tactful and unobtrusive way about their local folklore. In no way was he disappointed and the volume he was writing on anthropology soon had an abundance of facts and information. And yet, in some strangely elusive way, he felt the shadow of dissatisfaction. It was not severe enough to worry him or even impede his creative abilities and cheerfulness, but all the same it was there. Like some *imp of the perverse* it nagged at him, hinting that something was wrong.

After having been here a month, his steadily-growing horde of data had almost achieved saturation point and little more was really needed. Having done far better than he had expected prior to his arrival, he decided that he could now afford to relax more, investigating the harsh but strangely attractive countryside and the curious dwellings about it - something which he had only been able to do on a few brief occasions before.

As he had heard from many of his anti-quarian friends, Heron itself was a veritable store of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century buildings, with only a few from any later periods. Except for the ramshackle huts, and even these were perversely fascinating. None of them exhibited any features suggesting comfort; sanitation and ventilation were blatantly disregarded and hampered to an unbelievable extent. Roughly constructed from wood veneered with mould, the murky insides infested with the humid and sickening stench of sweat, they were merely dwellings to sleep and shelter in, nothing more.

In fact, the only feature which he noticed they had in common with the other buildings was that each of them had heavy wooden doors, reinforced from outside with rusted strips of iron, barred by bolts or fastened with old Yale locks from within. Apart from the plainly obvious fact that there was nothing inside them to steal, Wilderman was puzzled at such troublesome, if not expensive, precautions against intruders.

Finally, when an opportunity presented itself, Wilderman asked Abel Wilton, a thick-set man with a matted beard and cunningly suspicious eyes, and one of the degenerates inhabiting these huts, why such

precautions were taken. But, despite his fairly close acquaintance with the man, for whom he had previously bought liquor and shared tobacco with for information about local legends, all the response he got was a flustered reply that they were to keep out the wild animals that "run 'n' 'ide in th' 'ills, where none but those pohzessed go; where they wait for us, coming down 'ere at night, a 'untin'," or so Wilton claimed. But his suddenly-narrowed eyes and obvious dislike of the subject belied him, though Wilderman tactfully decided to accept this explanation for the moment. After all, it would do him no good, he reasoned, to go around accusing people of being liars. It could only result in his drawing onto himself the animosity of Wilton's kinfolk who, ignorant though they were, were extremely susceptible to insult.

However, after having noticed this point about the clustered huts on the outskirts of Heron, Wilderman realised that all of the other houses that he had entered also had unusually sturdy locks. Not only on their doors, either; most had padlocks or bolts across the shutters on their windows, too, though they were already protected by bars on the ground floors. But, when he questioned someone about this, he again received a muttered reply about wild beasts, as well as the danger of thieves, and again he did not believe it. He could have been convinced of the possibility of thieves, even in the worthless huts, but how could he possibly accept the wild animals when he had never even seen a sign of them during his now-frequent rambles across the hills? Certainly none that were of any danger at all to man. And so, realising then that any further approaches on this subject would probably only bring similar results, he did not pursue it any further, though he fully intended to keep it in mind. Perhaps, he thought, this was what had been troubling him all along.

It was at this time, in late October, when he was beginning to pay closer attention to his surroundings, that he first realised that no one ever left their houses after dusk. Even he himself had never gone out after nightfall before since it had kept light until late. But as the nights became longer, creeping remorselessly into the dwindling days, this universal peculiarity in Heron be-

came apparent to him, adding yet another mystery to be solved.

The first time he had this brought to his attention was one evening when he tried to leave the inn and failed, both the front and back doors being locked. Irritably he strode up to Mrs Jowitt, an elderly woman, grey of face and hair with needle-like fingers and brown teeth that seemed to blend in with the gloom of the sitting-room where she sat knitting a shawl. Without preamble he asked why the inn had been locked at so early an hour.

For a moment she seemed to have been stunned into silence by his outburst and immediately stopped her work to turn towards him. In that brief instant her face had paled into a waxen mask, her eyes, like Wilton's, narrowing menacingly - or were they, Wilderman conjectured in surprise, hooded to hide the barely-concealed fear he felt he could glimpse between the quivering lids?

"We always lock up at night, Mr Wilderman," she drawled at length. "Always 'ave an' always will do. It's one of our ways. P'raps it's foolish - you might think so - but that's our custom. Any'ow, there's no reason to go out when it's dark, is there? There's nowt 'ere i' the way of entertainment. Besides, can't be too careful. More goes on than you'd suspect, or want to. Not only is there animals that'd kill us in our sleep, but some o' them in the 'uts - I'm not sayin' who, mind you - wouldn't think twice o' breakin' and takin' all I've got if I didn't lock 'em out."

Her reply left little with which Wilderman could legitimately argue, without seeming to do so solely for the sake of argument, and he was loath to antagonise her. Always he was aware that he was here only on the townspeople's toleration; they could very easily snub him or even do him physical damage and get away with it. Justice (a dubious word here) was at best rudimentary. It depended for a large part on family connections and was as good as open bribery. At its worst and most frequent, it depended on personal revenge, reminding Wilderman distastefully of the outdated duelling system of latter-day Europe, though with significantly less notice taken of honour.

Convinced that fear of wild animals was not the reason for Mrs Jowitt's locking of the doors after dusk, Wilderman became determined to delve further into this aggravating mystery.

The next morning, rising deliberately at dawn, he hurried noiselessly down the staircase to find his landlady busy unlocking the front door. So engrossed was she in the seemingly arduous task that she did not notice his presence.

Finally succeeding in turning the last of the keys, she cautiously prised the door open and peered uneasily outside. Evidently seeing nothing to alarm her, she threw the door open and knelt down to pick up an enamel dish from the worn doorstep outside. Filled with curiosity, Wilderman tried to see what was on it, but could only glimpse a faint red smear that might have been a reflection of the sun now rising lightheartedly above the hills.

Before Mrs Jowitt could turn and see him, he retraced his steps to the second floor, walking back down again loudly and calling a greeting to her. After a few brief, but necessary, comments about the weather, he left, stepping out into the cold, but refreshing, early morning air. The narrow streets were still half-obscured by mists, through which beams of sunlight shone against the newly unshuttered windows like drops of molten gold.

As he slowly made his way down the winding street he could not help but notice the plates and dishes left on many of the doorsteps. Some others had been shattered and left on the stagnant gutter that ran down the centre of the street to a mud-clogged grate at the end.

It was immediately obvious to Wilderman that these dishes had contained meat - raw meat - as shown by the watery stains of blood still on them. But why should the villagers leave food out like this, he asked himself? Every one of them, including those in the fetid huts, even though they had little enough to eat at the best of times?

Such behaviour as was evident here seemed ludicrous to him. Why, indeed, should they have left food out like this, presumably for animals, when they dared not go out after nightfall for fear of those very creatures which the meat would only attract? It didn't make sense! That people in Heron were not exceptionally kind and generous to animals he knew; quite the opposite, in fact. Already he had seen what remained of one dog - a wolfhound with Alsatian blood in its savage veins - that made a nuisance of itself one Saturday on Market Street. Its mangled carcass, gory and flayed to the

bone, had almost defied description after some ten or so heavy boots, backed by resentful legs, had crushed it writhing into the cobbles. Then why, if they had no other feelings but contempt for their own animals, should they be so unnaturally benevolent to dangerous and anonymous beasts?

Obviously, though, no-one would tell him why they did this. Already he had tried questioning them about their heavily locked doors with only the barest of results. There was, he knew, only one way in which he would have the slightest chance of finding out anything more, and that was to see for himself what came for the food.

Preparing himself for the nocturnal vigil, he returned to his room and spent the rest of the day re-reading several of his notes and continuing his treatise from where he had left off the previous day.

Nightfall soon came, and with it an all-penetrating fog that tainted everything, even the inside of his room, with an obscuring mist. Sitting on a high-backed chair by the window, he cursed it, but was adamant that the fulfilment of his malign curiosity would not be foiled by a mist.

Almost as soon as the sun had disappeared beneath the fog-hidden mountains, Wilderman heard several nearby doors being opened, though no one called out. The only sound was that of the indistinct clatter of plates being placed on the pavements, before the doors were hastily slammed shut and locked. Following this came an absolute silence in which nothing stirred on the fog-shrouded street. It was as though all life and movement had come to an end, disturbed only by the clock, atop the hearth within his room, as it slowly ticked out the laboured seconds and minutes. Then something caught his attention.

Looking out over the worn windowsill, he stared down at the street, trying to penetrate the myopic mist. Some thing or things were coming down the street. But the noises were strange and disturbing, not the anticipated padded footfalls of wildcats or dogs gone ferile from neglect or cruelty. No, the sounds that reached his ears were far from expected, but were like a sibilant slithering sound, as of something possessed by an iron determination dragging itself sluggishly across the cobbles.

A tin plate was noisily up-ended and went clattering down the street, coming to a halt at the raised pavement beneath his window. As he leaned out further to look, he saw a darkish, shadowy thing, a hulking shape, appear. For several moments following this intrusion he heard no more until the creature found its food and began to devour it.

Pulling himself together, Wilderman shouted to scare whatever was beneath him away. But as his cry echoed dismally down the street to the clock tower in the square at the end, it sounded even more hysterical at each dimming repetition, more forlorn and pathetic. There was only an instant's pause before he heard the other milling creatures on the street begin to drag themselves across and along it, deserting their food to make their way to the inn.

And with them came a fiendish tittering, ghoulish in its overtly inhuman form, devoid of all but the foulest of feelings: Hatred, lust, and surprising Wilderman in his interpretation of it, an almost insatiable greed. So clear was it in the vague sounds shuddering below, that he felt the tremors of panic growing inside him, sweat streaming down his face. Again, after an inner struggle, he called out, his voice rasping with fear.

In answer came a scratching at the base of the inn beneath his window, as though something sought to surmount the decaying barrier.

More shapes were gathering on the street, slithering towards the inn and scratching at it. Trembling fiercely, he realised why the villagers took such precautions as they did, and why none spoke or left their houses at night, leaving the village as though deserted. But the facade had been broken. They knew he was here, they had heard him!

Picking up a heavy fore-edged book, he hurled it down at the creatures below. As it struck them there was the sound as of a large stone falling into mud, and then a series of cracks like breaking bones, thin, brittle ones, shattered by the copper-bound book. At this the horrid sounds increased into a crescendo of fiendish glee. A shriek as inhuman as the others, yet still possessing the wretched qualities of agony and terror, echoed down the street. But loud and terrible though this was, no one in any of the neighbouring houses appeared to see what was happening. All shutters and

doors remained closed.

A sudden breeze, that died almost as soon as it came, sent the fog floundering from the street in scattering wisps. Wilderman saw the shapes more clearly though blurred even now by the gloom. For a time he had thought them to be animals, hybrids of some sort, but what he now saw was neither wholly bestial nor human, but possessed - or seemed to be possessed, in the shadow world they inhabited - of the worst features of each. Hunched, with massive backs above stunted heads that hung low upon their chests, they dragged themselves along with skeletal arms which, when outstretched above their shoulders into the diffused light from his room, proved white and leprous, crumbling as though riddled with decay. Tapering to gangrenous stumps, their fingers opened slowly, painfully, and closed again before the mist returned and revealed them in a spectral haze.

When once more half-hidden in the fog, Wilderman saw that the shadows were converging upon one spot which then became progressively clearer, more distinct. And suddenly, with the self-consuming quicklime of fear, he realised why; slowly, inevitably, they were climbing upon each other to form a hillock, a living hillock to his window!

Again he threw a book at them, and then another and another, each more savagely than the last. But though they seemed to crash into and through the skulking bodies, the mound still continued to grow. And from the nethermost extremes of the mist-filled street, he could make out others slithering and shuffling towards the inn.

In alarm Wilderman threw himself back from the window, slamming and fastening its shutters as he did so. Then in a fit of nausea he staggered to a basin on his dresser and was violently sick. Outside, the tittering was continuing to grow louder, nearer. Awful in its surfeit of abhorrence, it filled Wilderman with increasingly more dread at every passing instant. With movements strained from forcing himself to resist the panic he felt growing inside him, he crept behind the writing desk in the centre of the room until, with his hands clenched tightly on it, he faced the shuttered window. His face shivering uncontrollably as his eyes stared harder and harder at the window... Waiting, dreading the end of his wait, fearing the expected arrival.

And still from outside, the gibbering, the hellish, inhuman giggling increased in volume until suddenly it ended and a scratching of claws on wood took its place. The shutters shook and rattled on their creaking hinges so violently that they threatened to give way at any moment. And then they did.

Myriad shrieks of fiendish glee flooded Wilderman's room. Shrieks that mingled with, and then utterly overpowered and drowned, the tortured screams of anguish, terror and then agony that were human; and which ended as the slobbering, tearing sounds of eating took their place.

THE next day, as a reluctant sun reared itself in a blood-red crescent above the pale pine forests to the east, the locked door to Wilderman's room was forced open by two of Mrs Jowitt's permanent guests after her unsuccessful attempt to rouse him earlier. As the men pushed and beat at the old oak panels, she waited behind them, shivering as she remembered the cries of the night when she lay locked in her room down the passageway, wide-eyed in fear and dread. So had, as she could tell by their red-rimmed eyes and fearful expressions, the two men.

With a mournful rending of wood, the door fell inwards. As the men were contorted with disgust and nausea, Mrs Jowitt looked into the room and screamed. Inside, the room was cluttered with shattered and overturned furniture, scratched till the wood was bare, sheets torn into shreds, and a skeletal thing that lay amidst a bloody upheaval of tattered books, manuscripts, pens and cloth; bones scattered to every corner.

THOUGH the circumstances surrounding Wilderman's death did not show even the vaguest trace of suicide, this was the verdict solemnly reached by the coroner, a native of Heron, four days later in the poorly-lit village hall.

All through the hastily-completed inquest Wilderman's various relatives were refused permission to view his remains before they were interred in the cemetery on the outskirts of the village. The coroner said that his mode of self-destruction - drowning himself in a nearby river - and the fact that it had taken nearly a week to find him, had left the body in a state that was most definitely not wise to be seen.

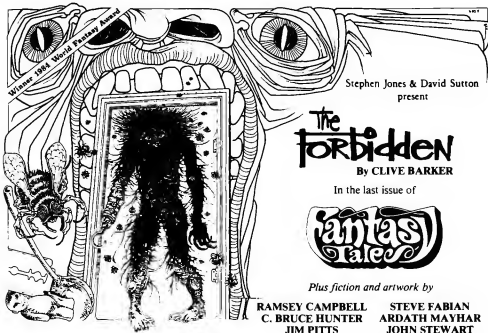
"It would be better to remember him as

he was," said the wrinkled old man, nervously cleaning his wire-framed bifocals, "than as he is now."

While outside, unnoticed by the visitors, the church warden completed his daily

task of beating down the disrupted earth on the graves in the wild and tawny burial ground, whispering a useless prayer to himself before returning to his home for supper.

David Riley, although not prolific, has found markets very ready to take his particular slant on horror, be it *The Fan Book of Horror Stories* (number 11 with *Lurkers in the Abyss*) to *Death (Prickly)*, picked up by editor Stuart Schiff for this *Playboy* paperback). One particular story, *The Farmhouse*, has so far made appearances in *New Writings in Horror & The Supernatural Volume 1*, edited for Sphere Books by David Sutton, *Whispers* magazine and the Gahan Wilson-edited *World Fantasy Awards* volume from Doubleday. Various small press appearances dot Dave's fictional landscape, plus *A Bottle of Spirits* in *New Writings in Horror & The Supernatural Volume 2* (Sphere) and the title story in *The Satyr's Head and Other Tales of Terror* (Corgi), both edited by Dave Sutton. The latter tale is now being adapted into a novel, taking place twelve years on from the original novelette. After *Nightfall*, which we reprint here, made its first professional appearance in Sphere's first volume of *Year's Best Horror*, then edited by Richard Davis, and an early draft had been published in a small press magazine, *Weird Window*, edited by FT's associate editor.




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The Farthing Lord

By JON BYE



I AM HERE, the smallest, king of all birds,
midwinter farthing lord,
trapped in spined furze.

Each boy blacken face, each man buckle sword,
now as for each year,
my name is your word.

So carry me round on a velveteen bier,
but think not I'm dead,
nor shed any tear.

To those in the twelvemonth sweethearts have wed,
one brown barred feather
will warm their night's bed.

I give one brown feather, one sprig of wild heather,
should maids sing and trip
we'll shift off this weather.

Again from the brushmouse hot blood will drip,
to smash the ice chalice
and free winter's grip.

Then welcome me gladly, fear not my malice.
Gently tread wildwood
and spinney - my palace.

Should you refuse me or harm my young brood,
beware fire, wreck, storm, worse -
milk veined with blood.

Hunt now the cutty one waiting in furze,
midwinter farthing lord,
king among birds!

Take Five

By SAMANTHA LEE

Illustration by JIM PITTS



"A hush fell over the crowded salon."

ZOOT shook his head but the fuzziness remained.

If it hadn't been so uncool, he might even have said "Where am I?" His last memory was of blowing the ultimate note in *Satin Doll*...then blackout.

And yet, here he was, sitting in this exceedingly plush dive, a dive wherein he was sure, he had never before set foot; with a drink in one hand, a cheroot in the other and a tingling anticipation in his guts such as he hadn't felt since he was a kid in downtown Chicago.

"Hey man!"

Zoot looked up in surprise.

A tall, dark stranger stood observing him nonchalantly. What could only be described as a sardonic smile was plastered across his kisser.

"Hey," said Zoot, taking the new dude in.

No doubt about it, the cat was sharp...as a tack. The creases in the trousers of his smart, pinstripe suit would have done justice to a razor and the points of his narrow lapels could have doubled as toothpicks. The blood-red carnation that stained one of the aforementioned lapels was the only spot of colour in the entire, tasteful collage. He was wearing a black silk shirt, a white satin tie and a very snappy dove-grey fedora. His feet were hidden by the tablecloth but Zoot would have bet his sax to a penny whistle that he was wearing spats.

He was that kind of dude.

"May I?" asked the stranger. And before Zoot could say "Yeah" or "Nay", he had eased his elegant frame into an adjoining gilt chair.

"Drink?" he enquired politely, and Zoot said he didn't mind if he did.

The stranger pointed a manicured fingernail at Zoot's near-empty glass and before his astonished gaze the level of the corn-coloured liquid rose until it was lapping the brim.

"Now listen man..." Zoot began, but

his companion raised a silencing hand. "Show's about to start," he said.

A hush fell over the crowded salon as the red velvet curtains swished back to reveal a big band liveried in scarlet and black. A pink spotlight ricocheted off the glinting instruments and threw dancing flames onto the dark orange backcloth.

Zoot's eyes began to pop as they travelled over the brass section.

This surely was some line-up.

In fact the entire band consisted of the grooviest selection of heads ever assembled under one roof.

And yet, something niggled at the back of his mind.

It wasn't until a very famous black lady singer stepped up to the microphone and enquired of the assembled throng 'Was she blue?' that the penny dropped.

That particular very famous black lady singer was also very dead.

As were the rest of the ensemble.

Zoot closed his eyes and abandoned himself to the sound. It was like nothing he'd ever heard before. It lapped around his eardrums like liquid silk.

"I made it," he whispered to himself.

"Man, I actually made it. I never had myself figured for Heaven. But here I am."

"Why don't you sit in?" suggested a smooth voice at his elbow.

Zoot shook himself out of his euphoria and found himself staring into the dark stranger's mesmeric eyes.

"What me?" he said in awe. "Play with those cats? You gotta be joking."

The tall stranger said far from it, he owned the joint and Zoot only had to say the word. To Zoot's objection that he hadn't brought his reed he responded by producing one out of thin air. A gold, gleaming tenor saxophone the like of

which Zoot had never been able to afford all his drink-sodden days.

He hefted the instrument lovingly in his hands, put the mouthpiece between his lips and blew a few practise scales.

It was as though the sax played him. Its mellifluous tones fired Zoot's long dormant ambition and soothed any nerves he might have had about playing with the illustrious gang onstage.

"What the Hell," he muttered. "What have I got to lose?"

The trumpet player waved a welcoming hand at him as he clambered up the rostrum steps. The band were into an up-tempo version of Zoot's favourite tune ... *Honey-suckle Rose*.

He joined in, playing like he'd never played before, blowing the skids from under ever other sax man there. He even took a solo, one that elicited an ecstatic response from the crowded floor.

Zoot was beside himself.

The tune wound on and on, 'til the band had exhausted every nuance of every variation of every theme. And then they began again.

Zoot began to flag a little. The old ticker wasn't all that it might have been. He felt the tell-tale twinge in the chest, that numbing sensation in the arm that heralded an attack. He shuffled across to the bandleader and hissed in his ear.

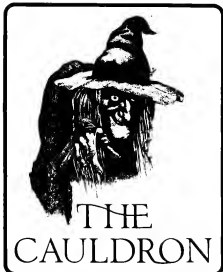
"Hey man...When do we take a break?"

The trumpet player rolled his eyes in Zoot's direction. They held a hollow helplessness that made his blood run cold. For the first time since Zoot had come onstage, the trumpet player lowered the mouthpiece from his face. Blood oozed from the split in a top lip covered in half-healed sores.

"What break?" he said.

Samantha Lee's first venture into print was an article for *Over 21* magazine, called *Africa Between Acts*, written while she was still a professional singer. Since then she has contributed to such diverse publications as *Knave* and *TV Times* and is currently a feature writer for *Workout Magazine*. In the science fiction and horror field she has been published in at least a dozen anthologies and has produced a series of science fantasy books for young people - 'The Lightbringer Trilogy'. Half-a-dozen of her short stories were featured in Capital Radio's *Moment of Terror*. Samantha has also written two TV series for children and a single play, *Billy Boy*, set in Northern Ireland. She is currently adapting Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* for Beaver Books' *Fleshcreeper* series.





THIS issue is appearing a little later than we expected, for which our apologies. We hope you'll agree that the wait was worthwhile.

Fantasy Tales 15 is our third issue in just over twelve months, which might not sound much, but is excellent for a small press publication like *FT*. However, three numbers within such a short period seems to have overwhelmed some of our readers as the number of letters we receive has been steadily declining. We want to publish your most pertinent comments in *The Cauldron*, so please remember that when you send us your three favourite stories in this issue, make sure you include a letter of comment as well. We appreciate hearing from you...

Many of our readers will now be aware of the horrendous problems visited upon veteran *Weird Tales* author and *Fantasy Tales* contributor Manly Wade Wellman after he suffered a fractured arm last year. In September complications during hospitalisation necessitated the amputation of both his legs. This trauma was not helped by medical expenses far beyond the expectations of his insurance cover.

At the World Fantasy Convention in Tucson last year, attendees raised \$3000 to contribute to a Wellman fund. Here in Britain, at a recent British fantasy Open Night in London, an auction of donated collectable items raised another £760...

Both these sums should help Manly and Frances a little with their precarious financial state. Letters and cards from our readers would be most welcome, and should be sent to Manly Wade Wellman, c/o 82 Dogwood Acres Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, U.S.A.

On behalf of everyone at *Fantasy Tales* we wish him well with his recovery. As of this writing, Manly is in fact back at his typewriter working on a new novel - a remarkable achievement.

Back in our Summer 1981 issue we published a novelette by Californian writer Dennis Etchison. *The Dark Country* had been rejected by a number of other publications, and although it did not contain any overt horror or supernatural elements, we firmly believed it belonged in our 'Magazine of the Weird and Unusual'. Other people obviously agreed, because the story went on to win both the British and World Fantasy Awards for that year, was reprinted in *Year's Best Horror* and lent its title to a successful hardcover and paperback collection of Dennis' short fiction. Next issue we are very proud to once again present a major story by Dennis Etchison: We believe that *The Olympic Runner* is in the tradition of *The Dark Country*. Make sure you order your copy of *Fantasy Tales 16* now, and decide for yourself if we have another award-winning contribution from this acclaimed author...

Finally, although they are not mentioned on our Back Issues advert on the page opposite, we still have a *very few* copies left of *Fantasy Tales 4, 6 and 11* (at £1.10/\$4.00 per copy, including postage and packing). This will probably be the last time we can offer these numbers, so order now from the Wembley address.

BARKER'S BEST

Peter Bayliss, from Street Ashton, Rugby writes: "Regarding *FT14*: The editors should be congratulated for putting together another excellent issue, in which the best story was undoubtedly Clive Barker's *The Forbidden*. One of the longest stories to have yet appeared in *FT*, its novelette length enabled the successful building up of both characterisation and suspense, more difficult with a shorter story. However, Ramsey Campbell manages to achieve both suspense and a marvellous portrayal of the old couple in *The Sneering*, a rather depressing story which nonetheless deserved second place. My third choice was Ardath Mayhar's *The Push-*

Stephen Jones & David Sutton

present

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Fantasy Tales has been published regularly since 1977. In that time it has won The British Fantasy Award on four successive occasions, and in 1984 was presented with the World Fantasy Award. The lead story in issue 8 - *The Dark Country* by Dennis Etchison - won both the British and World Fantasy Awards, and stories from the magazine are regularly reprinted in collections and anthologies - including DAW Books' *Year's Best Horror Stories* series. The aim of *Fantasy Tales* is to re-create the look and entertainment value of the pulp magazines of the 1930s and '40s, and to this end we publish fiction, art and verse by both established authors and newcomers to the genre. Each issue is digest size, has more than 50 pages, and from issue 13 onwards boasts full-colour glossy covers. A number of issues are now out of print (and have become much sought-after collector's items), however, we can still offer the following back issues:

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|---|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| FANTASY TALES 5 / Winter, 1979 <i>H.P. Lovecraft & Brian Lumley; H. Warner Mun; Randall Garrett etc.</i> | 60p/\$2.00 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 8 / Summer, 1981 <i>Dennis Etchison; Hugh B. Cave; Brian Lumley; Brian Mooney etc.</i> | 75p/\$2.50 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 9 / SPRING, 1982 <i>H. Warner Mun; Thomas Ligotti; Lin Carter; Brian Lumley etc.</i> | 75p/\$2.50 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 10 / Summer, 1982 <i>Ramsey Campbell; Manly Wade Wellman; Mike Chinn; Scott E. Green etc.</i> | 75p/\$2.50 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 12 / Winter, 1983 <i>Robert Bloch; Dennis Etchison; Darrell Schweitzer; Robert E. Howard</i> | 75p/\$2.50 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 13 / Winter, 1984 <i>Robert Bloch; Charles L. Grant; William F. Nolan; Steve Rasnic Tem etc.</i> | 90p/\$3.00 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 14 / Summer, 1985 <i>Ramsey Campbell; Clive Barker; Ardath Mayhar; C. Bruce Hunter etc.</i> | 90p/\$3.00 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 15 / Winter, 1985 <i>Fritz Leiber; Charles L. Grant; Frances Garfield; Adrian Cole etc.</i> | 90p/\$3.00 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
| FANTASY TALES 16 / Due Summer, 1986 <i>Dennis Etchison; Hugh B. Cave; Peter Tremayne; Philip C. Heath etc.</i> | 90p/\$3.00 | 20p/\$1.00 | |
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over, a more conventional fantasy but with an unexpected and ingenious ending. I was disappointed with *The Castle at World's End* and *House of Ill Repute*, although I thought Chris Naylor showed great promise in the former, written in the best traditions of sword & sorcery. It takes skill to write a really good short short, and C. Bruce Hunter makes it look deceptively simple in his splendidly ghoulish little tale, *The Other Side*. With regard to the artwork, I thought the front cover by Jim Pitts was disappointing. I'd like to see a return to the imaginative flavour of Jim's early colour covers such as *FT2* and *FT4*. I also noticed *FT14* was the first issue without a separate back cover illo. Although I know adverts are an important source of revenue to offset printing costs, I'd rather see a return to back cover artwork. The drawings inside *FT14* were of the usual high standard, especially Stephen Fabian's illustration to *The Castle at World's End* and John Stewart's double-page artwork for *The Forbidden*."

MORE FANTASY

From last issue's author Chris Naylor, Buckhurst, Essex: "Just a word of thanks for publishing *Castle* in *FT14*: The presentation, as always with *FT*, was excellent. The proofreading, also, had obviously been done carefully and conscientiously - thanks particularly for that! Thanks too to Stephen Fabian for his atmospheric and superbly executed illustration. Actually I had mixed feelings about *FT14*. Ignoring my own story, about which I can't be sufficiently objective, the overall quality was very high for both fiction and artwork. But in terms of variety, the issue was overbalanced, for me, by the inclusion of two 'urban horror' stories - *The Sneering* and *The Forbidden* - which together occupied more than twice as much space as all the other writing put together. Of course I have a vested interest here - I want to see as much space as possible in *FT* for my kind of work, and I don't write urban horror! Still, the magazine is called *Fantasy Tales*. Not that Campbell and Barker's stories were badly written - both were outstanding. I'd just like to see more fantasy and less horror."

VERY PLEASED

Nic Howard, from Reading, Berkshire,

writes to tell us: "I was very pleased with *FT14*. The front cover was excellent and atmospheric - much as I liked them, I wouldn't like to see the old monochrome ones back now. *The Sneering* was typical Campbell: Pretty good, with his usual handling of imagery. Ardath Mayhar's *The Pushover* was fun - a good example of the 'come-uppance' story. I must admit that I hadn't read any of Clive Barker's work until *The Forbidden*. I can see that I'm going to have to give the *Books of Blood* a go now! The urban terror setting was very well handled - I hadn't read anything similar since I began to read Ramsey Campbell, or in Leiber's *Our Lady of Darkness* (probably the best supernatural terror novel ever written). John Stewart's illo was a delight - especially the wording on the sweet tube: 'Blunt's Extra Weak Mints' (you either love 'em or hate 'em...I love 'em!) *The Other Side* by C. Bruce Hunter was an absolute waste of space - at least Allen Koszowski's illo was up to his usual ghoulish standard."

UNBALANCED ISSUE

From Stewart Morri, Moreton-on-Lugg, Hereford: "I have just read issue 14 and I feel it is the strongest I've seen, having started with issue 10. It is also rather unbalanced however, and the strength lies purely in the two superb 'lead' stories. Never before having encountered Clive Barker's work, I was thrilled by *The Forbidden*, a fascinating and chilling study of the darker side of the modern human psyche. It was the first time in a long while I have been genuinely unsettled by a story, and full marks to Mr. Barker for not taking the easy route of mindless gore. Running it a close second was Ramsey Campbell's contribution, almost matching Barker's sense of urban and human decay while creating an atmosphere of depression that communicates itself to the reader without turning him off. The rest of the stories were not especially memorable; *The Pushover* and *The Castle at World's End* being a trifle predictable, while *House of Ill Repute* failed to hold my interest despite its brevity. I would award third place, therefore, to the C. Bruce Hunter tale for its wry stance. As a closing thought, although I like stories of horror and the macabre, and I am glad to see them flourish in *FT*, I would like to see more 'lighter' tales included. I wonder if



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the dominance of macabre fiction is a conscious editorial decision or if it is dictated by the submissions you receive?"

IT COMES OF AGE

Our regular illustrator Alan Hunter writes from Boscombe East, Bournemouth: "This must be the year that *Fantasy Tales* really comes of age - full-colour covers, full-colour interior advertising, double-spread illustration, and two modern tales of urban horror. There is not much doubt about the first place in the story rating. Apart from being the longest, occupying more than a third of the magazine, *The Forbidden* also reaches a new level in modern horror. The Estate background to the tale becomes as much alive as the characters and the occasional touches of humour (sadly lacking in Ramsey Campbell's writing) give an authentic human touch to the bizarre events. *The Sneering* deserves second place, judged against the four short stories squeezed into the remaining space in the mag. It was well written, with occasional flashes of surreal word imagery that has become Ramsey's trademark, but it lacked the overall composition of a well-constructed story. The climax really came on the second page; the rest was a rundown to the inevitable end. Choosing third place out of the remaining stories is rather difficult. They were all good, in their own way, but seem slight and fanciful against the length and stark realism of the two lead items. Perhaps I will pick *The Castle at World's End* because the fantasy and lyrical style provided such a welcome contrast. The art and presentation was excellent. Jim did a great job on the cover and I loved John Stewart's double spread - it fitted the story like a glove. Mark Dunn is a talent to watch - I have seen a lot of his work around in recent months and I like it. And what I particularly liked about the colour ad sheet was that, if anyone objects to such blatant SF advertising in a fantasy mag it can be easily removed without damaging the magazine in any way. Overall, I must rate this your best issue to date."

ONE OF OUR BEST

David Cowperthwaite, from Norris Green, Liverpool, writes: "What an excellent issue number 14 is, and how nice to see that it is predominantly filled with Brit-

ish authors and artists, unlike the previous issue which, I think, was far too American. I think my favourite story this time around was *The Forbidden* by Clive Barker. I was truly gripped by this tale, and very surprised at how good his writing is, never having crossed a story by him before. And it has made me want to go out and buy at least one of the *Books of Blood*! Second best story - and a very close second - is good old Ramsey Campbell with *The Sneering*. An exceptionally moving tale, and what a poignant ending! Difficult to choose the third place; but I think it will have to go to Chris Naylor's *The Castle at World's End*, an enjoyable, well-written fantasy, reminiscent, as you say, of Dunsany. The rest of the stories were okay, but none of them really outstanding. As for artwork, as usual it was all of a high standard - particularly John Stewart's double-pager for *The Forbidden*, and the marvellous Mark Dunn and Steve Fabian. I liked the cover as well, which reminds me a lot of your first four issues. One of your best."

MORE TEXT

From Romford, Essex, Rob Gregg tells us: "*Fantasy Tales 14* was the first I've read, and I was very impressed with the standard. *The Forbidden* was actually the first Clive Barker I've read, but believe me, it will not be the last. I was thoroughly engrossed, even if the ending was a little daft. Excellent all the same. I don't dislike Ramsey Campbell's style, but *The Sneering* seemed more like 80 pages than 8. I didn't like the artwork much either. Colour covers are an extravagance in my opinion - more text would be better."

MOST POPULAR STORY

As you have probably guessed by the comments in this issue's *The Cauldron*, the most popular story - by a large majority - in *Fantasy Tales 14* was Clive Barker's *The Forbidden*, followed by Ramsey Campbell's *The Sneering* and *The Pushover* by Ardath Mayhar.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

Alan Hunter illustrated *Book of the Dead* and also contributed the artwork on page 41; page 20 is by Allen Kozowski and page 35 by Sue Simpson, while Jim Pitts illustrated *The Farthing Lord* and the *Contents* heading. The artwork for *The Cauldron* is courtesy of Dynamic Graphics.

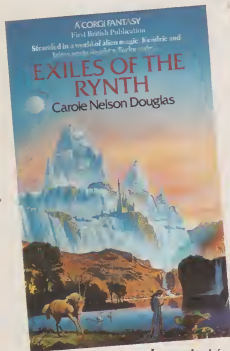
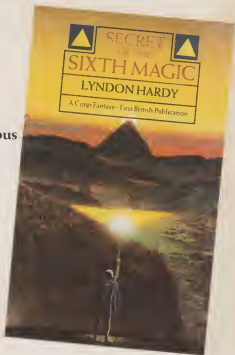
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